ESSAYS

VOLUME THREE

Sermons and Essays

Dallas Burdette

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Essays

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About This Collection

This volume contains sermons and essays written by Dr. Dallas Burdette of Montgomery, Alabama, during the last decade of the 20th century and into the early 21st. They were published for a number of years on his website, Freedom in Christ, before being archived on Archive.org. They have been combined here into a single volume, organized by topic, for ease of distribution.

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B. D. Lewis
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Christianity Versus Skepticism

Christians should learn to reason and to think correctly in analyzing the Christian faith. The church lives in an age of skepticism, an age that denies the Genesis account of Creation and the denial of a Supreme Being. The words of Jesus are appropriate for citation today as it was in His day: "Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?" (**Luke 12:57**). This admonition applies to both believers and unbelievers alike. Peter later reflected the words of Jesus when he wrote: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (**1 Peter 3:15**). If the church today had applied this principle of rational thinking, there would not be so many unbelievers today. It goes almost without saying that right reason should precede belief itself.

One witnesses dialogue between believer and unbelievers on Mar's Hill (**Acts 17:16-34**). There still needs to be exchange of ideas today. Millions today are unconvinced of the Deity of Christ and all that flows from belief in Him—supernatural conception, Resurrection, and miracles. Thousands upon thousands of so-called Christians are also indifferent toward spiritual things, but this disregard is nothing but unbelief, whether one professes faith in God or not. How can the church deal with such mental inertia, or passivity when it comes to the defense of the faith? If Christians wish to win men and women to Christ, they must enter into rational talk as to their belief in God and the Deity of Christ. Numerous individuals today are kept away from the church because of the chilling influences of modern doubt advanced in secular schools and universities. In today's society, children are taught evolution in the first grade.

As believers, Christians affirm that unbelief is demonstrably unreasonable. When Christians read books by atheists who deny the creation account in the Book of Genesis, one cannot help but recall the words of Jesus to the religous leaders: " You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (**Matthew 23:24**). Many present-day scientists and teachers strain out a gnat, but, at the same time are willing to swallow a camel. Whatever the difficulties of Christian belief are, one is acutely aware that the difficulites of unbelief are still greater. If one rejects Christianity because miracles seem incredible, one must stand in awe at the miracles that unbelief is compelled to assert, which miracles, according to their assertions, are far more incredible. Refusal to accept belief in God and His creation commits one to even greater difficulties. It goes almost without saying that the rejection of Christian truth becomes correspondingly more irrational, or illogical.

Why should one reject the Incarnation brought about by miraculous conception and the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God, and, at the same time, affirm the so-called miracle of the origin of the universe from an atheist's perspective—nothing created

something. Should one reject Christianity because the supernatural in Christianity is burdened with difficulties to the so-called scientific mind? When one takes away the supernatural in Christianity, what is left behind is no longer Christianity. If one advances the notion that the supernatural in Christianity is regarded as incredible, it is demonstrably more incredible without the supernatural intervention of Deity. Unbelief on the part of the atheist can only uphold its objections to Christian miracles by accepting an even greater and grosser miracle—nothing created something. There is absolutely no rationality to this system, a system of its own making.

As one contemplates this universe, one is conscious that the present universe had a start, or beginning, somewhere. Should one agree to the miracle of creation by a Creator or should one consent to the greater and all-embracing so-called miracle that some primordial nebulous allowed a multitude of atoms with their inherent forces and energies to create life as it is known today, that is to say, which atoms stood apart from one another and that were not evenly distributed to rearrange themselves in such a way that they were able to change the shapeless into the shapely, and the simple into the more and more complex until the highest complexity reached its full development of living matter. For one to find staggering difficulties with the biblical creation account and to accept that differentiated atoms created the world as is known today is truly to vault over a mountain and fall headlong over a straw.

As stated above, many modern scientists and teachers strain out a gnat, but, at the same time are willing to swallow a camel. When one comes to the universe, one cannot but wonder which is the greater miracle—belief in God or to believe that nothing created something. Yes, the greater miracle is to believe that matter made itself, that is to say, nothing created something out of nothing. For one to postulate that atoms—all being exactly alike—proceeded to make themselves into different things, which are entirely different from each other is incredible. How did atoms develop into Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Oxygen, and so on? Did the atoms endow themselves with all these potentialities? One wonders how these original atoms self-differentiated themselves to move into other forms of atoms. Did the atoms rearrange, or revampt, themselves through the function of mindless, or unintelligent, chance?

Since the world is made up of atoms, one cannot help but ask the question: did the atoms rework themselves by sheer force or energy through a self-created power, that is to say, through a mindless and senseless and aimless force? Did the unlike come out of the like? Did that which is shapely come out of the shapeless? Did the useful come out of the useless? Finally, did the living come out of the lifeless? Is this marvelous universe with its beauty and all its forms of life simply a result of blind chance? When one speaks of the differentiation of atoms, one observes the vegetable and animal kingdoms—set apart atoms in observation. In this world, one perceives order in the arrangement of atoms. Was there no guidance in the arranging of atoms in the creation of the animal and plant kingdom. Did the blind chance of atoms create men and women as well as all known living creatures on the face of the earth. Can one truthfully postulate, or speculate, that cells separated themselves into the human, vegetable and animal kingdom without any outside guidance? For one to accept this philosophy of blind chance is to swallow a camel (evolution) after straining out a gnat (Christianity with its miracles).

The modern world concept of evolution is an unverifiable assumption of dogmatic

beliefs. When one denies God and His creation, one indeed accepts outrageous assumptions. In the judgment of this author (Dallas Burdette), the atheistical background is so nonsensical that one finds it difficult to see how anyone can put it into words. It is a greater miracle to believe that haphazard collisions of mindless atoms through aeons of time created both male and female, the plant kingdom, and the animal kingdom. For the evolutionist or athesist to cry out against biblical creation by Deity is to recall the words of Jesus: "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (**Matthew 7:5**).

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Origin of the Human Race

The atheist or agnostic has no answers as to the origin of homo sapiens, that is to say, human beings—male and female. Only the inspired Scriptures given by the Holy Spirit accounts for the beginning, or start, of humanity. A perusal of the literature of unbelievers reveals that they do not distinquish between the animal kingdom and the kingdom of humanity—all are one and the same. Evolution is the common name assigned to justify such absurbities. Yes, skeptics who deny the existence of God and His supernatural revelation also disavow, or repudiate, that men and women are priviledged beings in this world. There is a confessed ignorance of atheists as they seek to account for the source of matter, the principle of motion in matter, the specific origin of the earth with its unique enviornment to sustain animal life, plant life, and human life, and so on.

The unbeliever has to admit much ignorance and to believe more mysteries than believers. For the atheist, unbelief is a far greater miracle than belief in the biblical account of creation for the Christian. The miracle of unbelief is that “nothing” created “something.” This mindset of unbelief is to swallow a camel and strain out a gnat, that is, the belief that God created the heavens and the earth. How does one account for both male and female in evolution. Did both evolve at the same time as infants or did they both evolve at the same time as full grown male and female? Were both male and female produced as coordinates with the existence of the earth as infants with no parents? If so, they could not have arrived to maturity. Do infants survive today without care? No! Experience teaches that the first pair must have been adults when first ushered into being. For one to deny the plain evidence of one’s survival as infants, one has to suppose, contrary to all experience, that the first pair (male and female) were not the same as the species known today.

Which came first the chicken or the egg? One knows that the chicken had to exist before the egg. If not where did the egg come from? Did the acorn, or seed, exist before the tree? In the vegetable kingdom, there had first to be the plant before a seed could fall to the earth. Even in the animal kingdom, there first had to be the male and female in its prime before there could be offspring. Nature cannot now produce a new genus, or classification, in the vegetable kingdom nor produce a new species, or variety, in the animal kingdom. By what rational evidence can it be shown or demonstrated that nature ever had such a power? If the first pair were infants, they could not have reached

maturity; they would have perished. One can only conclude, based upon experience, that both must have been adults.

How does one account for the idea of God that is so universally known among the various races of the world? How does one account for the motion of matter. For example, the earth revoling around the sun. Some planets have more than one moon—some revolving clockwise (in the same direction as the rotating hands of a clock) and others in the reverse (counterclockwise). What gives regularity to motion? Why do the planets choose to move in a uniform course, or order? How did the five senses come into existence? The five senses are essential for life. Even though some may be lacking in some of the five senses, nevertheless, they must depend upon others who possess these senses in order to survive. How does one account for the eye? How does one account for the sense of smell? How does one account for the sense of hearing? How does one account for the sense of taste? How does one account for the sense of feel?

The atheist thinks that the five senses just came about through blind and mindless chance. Which is the greater miracle—blind chance or God. There is not one single instance of "blind laws" or mindless chance creating anything. Did the blind laws of nature produce the computer, the space craft, the dictionary, the watch, the automobile, the airplane, and so on? If not, why should individuals assert that which is contrary to all experience and observation. If the universe was so irregular at one time, what causued its regularity? If the atheist or agnostic will reason from effect to cause, he or she will be confounded with an indisolubility of the following questions: (1) were the first man and woman infants or adults? Or (2) was there an acorn or an oak first? If one deals with these questions, one must also deal with other questions. For example, did the first man invent language himself and then pass this on to his offspring? Or, was there a convention of men and women co-existent who agreed upon names for every thing even before they could speak? No one has ever spoken who was not first spoken to. Athesit are ignorant of the origin of language.

Atheists are also ignorant of the origin of matter. Who made me? Where did I come from? These are questions that confronts the inquiring mind. For the atheists or agnostics have no reason to believe themselves a priviledged being in the scale of creation over any creature of the animal kingdom. According to their philosophy, a human is no better than a bee, an ant, a beaver, an elepant, a dog, a cat, and so on. Is this true according to one's experiences in life? Do labortories use live human beings to dissect, or separate into pieces, as they do animals? If not, why not? How did the first couple know what to eat? This information came directly from special revelation—revelation from Deity. Adam and Eve were able to narrate the information received by Divine revelation about the origin of things. One wonders how the first pair could remember, no doubt, the first time they saw the sun and not be able to know the author of their existence. God revealed Himself to both. In the original state of the first man and the first woman, they were able to converse with their Creator. Man is inferior to the animal kingdom in "instintive powers." But, on the other hand, men and women are governed by reason, not instinct.

When the first man and the first woman opened their eyes, their reason and senses were at their meridian, or peak, strength. From Adam and Eve, testimony was passed on to each generation concerning the origin of the universe and the existence of God. The

ability to rely upon testimony distinguishes and elevates humanity above the brute beast. It goes almost with saying that without testimony there could be no improvability in the world of humanity. Without testimony, both men and women would cease to be progressive beings. In the world of the atheist and the agnostic, one witnesses readiness or willingness to believe anything that is totally outside the bounds of reason. Christians are asked to swallow a camel (atheism) instead of straning out a gnat (Christianity). Is it more reasonable to believe that God created or that nothing created something?

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Paul's Conversion: Apologetic for the Authenticity of Christianity

In 1747, Lord Lyttelton (1709-1773), a Member of Parliament,[1] wrote a letter to Gilbert West (1703-1756)[2] concerning *Observations on the Conversion of St Paul*. Lyttelton's friend, Gilbert West, wrote, at the same time, a book on *Observations on the Resurrection of Christ*. Both men subscribed to the principles of infidelity, which infidelity, according to Rev. T. T. Biddolph, resulted from a superficial view of the Sacred Writings.[3] These two men came together to expose the incongruities, so they thought, concerning Paul's conversion and Christ's resurrection. In the course of their quest to scorn the Bible, both men ultimately wrote in defense of the Scriptures as God's Revelation to humanity. Initially, both Lyttelton and West sat down with their prejudices to overthrow the truth of Christianity, but, in the course of their separate attempts, these two men were converted by their efforts to put an end to the validity of Christianity. Their findings were published in separate accounts in 1747.[4]

What happened to these two men in 1747 is also seen in the lives of two men who lived in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, two names stand out in particular concerning belief from skepticism, or atheism, to belief in Jesus—Frank Morrison and C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). The story of Frank Morrison is appropriate to reflect upon as an excellent example of the study of Christian apologetics. Morrison's work concerning a defense of the resurrection of Jesus is a classic in the study of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. He wrote his book in 1930 in defense of the resurrection of Jesus, which was not his original intent. Morrison was an English journalist who set out to prove that the story of Christ's resurrection was nothing but a myth.

Yet, his probing led him to faith in the risen Christ.[5] Another person, C. S. Lewis, started out as a skeptic, but he, too, became a believer through analyzing the evidence for the Christian faith. His book *Mere Christianity*[6] is one of the most outstanding books in the field of Christian apologetics to this day. He writes with terseness and a keen sense of common logic about one who rejects Jesus' Messiahship, and, at the same time, portrays Jesus as a good man. One cannot maintain that Jesus was a good man and, at the same time, deny His claims. Lewis rightly concludes that Jesus could not be a good moral

teacher and say the things He said about His divinity:

> I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that upon to us. He did not intend to.[7]

> All four writers contributed to the weightiness of the evidence concerning the truthfulness of Christianity. There are many types of apologetics. This particular study focuses upon Paul's conversion as an apologetic for the defense and truthfulness of the Christian faith. One can say that Paul's conversion is another aspect of Christian apologetics that proves the integrity of the Christian faith. This paper investigates Paul's acceptance of Jesus Christ as an excellent example of the trustworthiness of Christianity as authentic and valid and convincing. The yielding of Paul to the call of Christ attests to the credibility of the genuineness of the Christian faith. This analysis of Paul's conversion to Christ follows the basic arguments found in Lord Lyttelton's book about Paul's acceptance of Jesus as God. In the writing of this study, I am deeply indebted to Lyttelton for his informative book (1747) on Paul's conversion.

As stated above, Christians can approach Christian apologetics from several different perspectives. One may focus upon the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament; one may concentrate upon the miracles of Christ; or one may pinpoint his or her studies upon the Resurrection of Christ—a resurrection that the apostles provide ample testimony as to the truthfulness of this belief. This essay's primary objective is to highlight the conversion of Paul as sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation from God, not some mythological story about the gods of the ancient world. As one approaches the conversion of Paul to Christianity, one discovers no rational motive for his becoming a disciple of Christ.

One cannot uncover any illogical enthusiasm for Paul's embrace of Christianity. Paul's enthusiasm for Christianity is sound, not irrational. His life attests to the reality of its conviction in his own mind as true. Did Paul have the ingredients of an enthusiast that borders on the fringes of insanity, or madness? The word *enthusiasm*, as a whole, in this study focuses on the negative characteristics of enthusiasm rather than the positive. Every Christian should possess the positive and not the negative features of enthusiasm. The negative side of enthusiasm focuses on gullibility, ignorance, overheated imagination, vanity, and so on. The negative facets of enthusiasm are associated with men like David Koresh, Jim Jones, or Benny Hinn. Lord Lyttleton writes about and captures the heart of the negative side of enthusiasm as related to the conversion of Paul to Christianity. He proves that Paul's conversion did not occur from gullibility, ignorance, vanity, glory, power, or an overheated imagination. One should pay attention to Lyttleton's writings as

he unfolds the negative, or harmful trait, of enthusiasm upon unsuspecting minds: "Now these are the Ingredients of which *Enthusiasm* is generally composed; great Heat of Temper, Melancholy, Ignorance, Credulity, Vanity, or Self-conceit."[8]

Did Paul have an overheated imagination? Was he prone to "credulity"? Did he suffer from "vanity" or "self-conceit"? Was he "ignorant" or educated? Did he suffer from "melancholy," or "down in the dumps"? Was he given to "credulity," or naïveté? A cursory reading of Paul's own account of his talk with the risen Lord reveals that he was neither an enthusiast from the damaging point of view that borders on the outer edges of lunacy, nor does his own personal description of his conversion portray one with an inflamed mind's eye for the fantastic. His two descriptions of his own conversion reveal soberness in his reaction to the Lord's call. An analysis of Paul's conversion in his own words reveals that he acted with soberness and gravity and weightiness in his decision to commit his life to the cause of Christ, which examination concerning his frame of mind, or way of thinking, will be investigated more thoroughly toward the end of this discussion.

Throughout this essay, this study focuses upon certain features of the negative, or injurious, characteristics of enthusiasm. Even though this paper concentrates, on the whole, on the negative facets of enthusiasm, nevertheless, there is room, stated earlier, for the positive, or constructive, viewpoint of enthusiasm in Christianity. In other words, enthusiasm is characteristic of anyone who understands the truthfulness of the Christian message (**Romans 12:11**). But this enthusiasm is also tempered with prudence, or good sense; it is not a wild, or lunatic, enthusiasm that accepts beliefs without reasonable examination (see **Acts 8:26-40**, Philip and the Eunuch). One observes throughout Paul's ministry that his zeal was eager and warm and tempered with prudence. One witnesses this kind of demeanor before Fetus, Agrippa, and Fexlix.

PAUL'S COST FOR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST

If one wishes to penetrate Paul's mind concerning the effects of his removal to Christianity from Judaism, one should allow him to tell his particular story in his own personal words. This study of Paul's conversion is peppered with Scripture citations from his own writings in order to enter into Paul's own thinking about the events surrounding his turnaround. Just a casual reading of Paul's comments to the various congregations reveals the devastating effects upon his earlier life as a result of his acceptance of Jesus. In this acknowledgment of Christ, one witnesses that Paul's swap-over to Christ cost him, perhaps, a fortune, a reputation, and friends. He, no doubt, was making inroads within the Pharisaic party, and as a result of his recognition of Christ as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, he repudiated a standing that he had gained through his zeal and labors and studies with the Pharisees, especially under Gamaliel. Paul himself comments upon his position among the Jews before his conversion and after his change:

> If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. [7] But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I

consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:4-11**).[9]

While in prison, Paul wrote this letter from Rome about AD 61. Why would Paul consider everything that was to his profit as loss for the sake of Christ? Did his experience with Christ really happen? If this encounter did not take place, one wonders why he gave up his friends, why he gave up his relationship with his colleagues, and, perhaps, members of his own blood family. The Scriptures are silent about his family members, except his sister and a nephew (One does not know if Paul had more than one sister). In his approval of Christ, he virtually estranged and banished himself for life from all that was so dear to him. In one of his earliest epistles (Galatians AD 48/49) he comments about this loss and why he was willing to sacrifice his life:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. [12] I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. [13] For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. [14] I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. [15] But when God, who set me apart from birth[a] and called me by his grace, was pleased [16] to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, [17] nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus (**Galatians 1:11-17**).

PAUL: IMPOSTOR OR AUTHENTIC?

Paul states emphatically: "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (**Galatians 1:14**). The Jewish nation soared in its religious opinions and in its strict orthodoxy that it had inherited from its forefathers—200 years of oral tradition. The strictest sect among the Jews was the Pharisees. Paul was brought up under this discipline. Surely he must have suffered emotional feelings in departing so suddenly from his party and becoming an adversary overnight to his former training. In Paul's autobiographical note about his prejudice against Christians, one sees one who was strongly confirmed in Judaism. In spite of the allurements of honor and advantage among the religious leaders who rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah, he renounced his prior opposition to Christ. Paul sacrificed his whole way of life to become a follower of the Way. As a result of his decision to pursue Jesus as the hope of Israel, one witnesses the cold-hearted retaliation of those whom he deserted. He received contempt from those whom he had courted and sought their blessings. If Paul had not had this heavenly vision from the risen Christ, one cannot help

but wonder why he would have chosen humiliation and poverty and persecution over fame, fortune, affluence, prestige, status, standing, clout, muscle, and power if he had not had a real discussion with the risen Jesus.

As a result of his actions against his own party, one sees the horrible retribution inflicted against him that would have frightened away any impostor, fake, or fraud, especially one knowingly engaged in the most hopeless scam as a charlatan and a cheater. For Paul to endure such harm, he would have to be absolutely out of his senses to engage in defending that which the religious leaders hated with passion, fury, and anger. Prior to Paul's conversion, he, too, shared this rage, this fury, and this wrath of hatred toward Christians (**Acts 22** and **26**). Luke, after Paul's conversion to Christianity, gives a comment about Paul's opposition to the Christian faith. Pay attention to him as he seeks to capture the animosity of Paul and the religious leaders against believers in Christ:

> Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest [2] and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (**Acts 9:1-2**).

Luke's statement about Paul's rage against Christ's disciples is mild compared to Paul's own personal versions as recorded by Luke in **Acts 22** and **26**, which reports give evidence as to the authenticity of Paul's change from Judaism to Christianity. Paul knew that this opposition to him would be just as vicious as his own actions against Christians prior to his acknowledgment of Christ as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Yet, in spite of his consciousness of persecution that awaited him, Paul did not retreat from his belief in Christ—a conviction that brought down upon his head the wrath, the rage, the anger, and the fury of the religious leaders. Why would Paul tolerate such tragedy and misfortune and disaster in his life unless he really experienced a direct encounter with the risen Jesus?

After Paul's immediate rendezvous with the Lord Jesus, the Lord appeared to Ananias, the one whom He sent to councel Paul about his new mission to advance God's kingdom upon earth: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. [16] I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Previous to Paul's recognition of Jesus as the promised Messiah, as stated earlier, he persecuted Christians with vehemence and enthusiasm. After his change, he became the persecuted and the hunted, not the persecutor. How does one explain his transformation from unbeliever to believer? Why was Paul willing to suffer ill-treatment? The answer lies in his direct exchange with the Lord Jesus Himself. His recognition of Jesus resulted in suffering beyond the endurance of many men and women.

The reality of his talking with Jesus of Nazareth is the only rational and realistic motivation for his willingness to undergo such ghastly and atrocious treatment. About twenty-three years after his switch to Christ, he wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (AD 55) about his sufferings for Christ:

> Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in

the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? [30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. [32] In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. [33] But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands (**2 Corinthians 11:23-33**).

NO DESIRE FOR GLORY OR POWER

"I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked," writes Paul. Are these the words of an impostor? Are these the words of a charlatan? Are these the words of one who seeks power? Are these the words of one who seeks fame and glory? In Paul's acceptance of Christ, one does not detect the desire of glory or the ambition of making a great name for himself. No! His motive for accepting Christianity did not focus on the love of power. He knew that the anger of the religious leaders against a deserter and betrayer of their cause would be poured forth against him with all political power at their disposal. He knew that the same rage that he had earlier perpetrated upon Christians would now be put into effect against him. Many years after his conversion, he wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians in which he describes the way the world views the followers of Christ:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. [10] We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! [11] To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. [12] We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; [13] when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. (**1 Corinthians 4:9-13**).

This graphic picture of his plight reveals that his decision to become a follower of Christ did not result from a love of power. If one postulates Paul's overhaul from Judaism to Christ as a struggle to gain power, one wonders about the nature of this so-called power. The question naturally presents itself: power over whom? Is it power over sheep to be slaughtered, whose shepherd had Himself been murdered by crucifixion? Could Paul expect more leniency, or mercy, than had been shown to Jesus Himself? The writings of Paul display with great clarity that he never sought power over anyone. In fact, one reads the very opposite of a grab for authority in Paul's demeanor. He writes unashamedly:

> Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, [9] and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things (**Ephesians 3:8-9**).

He did not pretend any superiority over God's people. Nor did he assume pre-eminence over other apostles. Again, he pens his thoughts about himself and the other apostles:

> For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. [11] Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (**1 Corinthians 15:9-11**).

Again, in this same epistle, he expresses himself simply as an instrument of God's grace, no special prerogatives over others who also proclaimed Christ. Paul writes with deep conviction as he seeks to suppress factious parties within the body of Christ:

> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas[a]"; still another, "I follow Christ." [13] Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into[b] the name of Paul? [14] I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, [15] so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. [16] (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) [17] For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (**1:12-17**).

Once more, Paul speaks of himself as a servant, not an overlord: "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?" (**3:5a**). He is only a servant. One's servanthood comes about through service to Jesus. Listen to Paul as he captures this mindset: "Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task" (**3:5b**). This condescension is the attitude of this one whom God chose to carry His message of salvation to the Gentiles and Jews. Paul served individuals with instruction and edification, not as an authoritative figure. Ultimately, Paul desired the same commitment that he displayed in his own ministry in the lives of those he converted. He wanted the same steadfastness manifested in his own life to be in the lives of his converts in order to exhibit God's glory in their daily walk. He expresses his ultimate goal of conversion and his willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ:

> Do everything without complaining or arguing, [15] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe [16] as you hold out[a] the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or

labor for nothing. [17] But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. [18] So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (**Philippians 2:14-17**).

Are these the words of an impostor? Paul, who looks beyond the bounds of this life, did not take advantage of his higher education and superior learning. In his heart-searching letter to the Corinthians, he writes about his testimony about God:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[c] [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. [4] My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, [5] so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5**).

THE SPIRIT'S POWER: MIRACULOUS

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power," writes Paul. These words set the tone for success in his evangelistic endeavors, in spite of persecution, maltreatment, and harassment. The faith he proclaimed was not of his own invention. In order for him to achieve something in this mission of preaching Jesus, he had to have a knowledge that was equal to that which the original apostles possessed. Since he had not earlier met Jesus or His apostles, he had to have this information. He received this knowledge directly from Jesus, which equipped him for his ministry. But his seeing Jesus was not completely sufficient to accomplish such a formidable task to convert heathens—people who knew nothing about the Old Testament prophecies. Something else was needed, namely, the ability to perform miracles in order to convince those to whom he proclaimed the message of redemption.

Paul's success depended upon the Spirit's power, that is to say, the miraculous. The method of proclaiming the word of salvation was with "a demonstration of the Spirit's power." Paul's preaching required the working of miracles in order to give validity to his message of redemption from darkness to light. In order for Paul to combat the several philosophical schools of his day, he needed something more than just his having seen Jesus. Paul faced almost insurmountable odds from the magistrates, from the priest, from the people, and from the philosophers. He needed something stronger than just arguments or reason in dealing with a heathen population. Thus, he tells the Corinthians, as just stated:

I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. [4] My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, [5] so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:3-5**).

To the Thessalonians, he, too, expresses the miraculous power associated with the preaching of the Word. Paul writes: "For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, [5] because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (**1 Thessalonians 1:4-5**). In order to gain

converts to Christ, this feat called for extraordinary power—the miraculous. It is in this vein that Luke records an astounding statement about Paul's work in Ephesus: "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, [12] so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them" (**Acts 19:11**).

This divine power enabled Paul to experience success. This power proved that he was not an impostor. John, too, calls attention to the testimony of miracles as proof of one's calling or mission. John records the coming of Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, to Jesus with these words about the miraculous in Jesus' ministry:

> Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. [2] He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (**John 3:1-2**).

To the individuals to whom Paul worked miracles, these persons were not in favor of him nor of the doctrines he taught. If Paul's work had been confined to Jerusalem, many of these citizens, not all, would have been inclined more toward the miraculous than the Gentiles in foreign counties, at least it appears this way from the historical accounts of Paul's missionary journeys. In Jerusalem, many had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and His apostles. Even on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand were converted in one day as a result of a miracle—speaking in tongues (**Acts 2**).

Shortly after this miraculous event took place, one reads about the healing of a man at the temple (**Acts 3**) and the number of the men growing to 5,000 (**Acts 4**). Again, one reads of Peter's shadow falling on individuals and miraculous cures occurred just from his shadow:

> [12] The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. [13] No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. [14] Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. [15] As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. [16] Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil[a] spirits, and all of them were healed (**Acts 5:12-16**).

If Paul had limited his work to Jerusalem, this manifestation of the Spirit's power, through miracles, would have been a good foundation for his labors. But this was not the case in his missionary journeys to the Gentiles. In Paul's journeys among the Gentiles, one discovers no such dispositions manifested among the heathens concerning the miraculous. Paul's missionary journeys focused on fertile ground with no knowledge of Christ and no concept of those who came in the power of His name. His work in Lystra is an example of how the Gentiles reacted to the miraculous.

> In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. [9] He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at

him, saw that he had faith to be healed [10] and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. [11] When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" [12] Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. [13] The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them (**Acts 14:8-13**).

The citizens of Lystra were not predisposed toward Paul and the miraculous. This miraculous act came as a total surprise to the Lycaonians. When one reads Luke's account, one must ask: were the citizens of Lystra involved in gullibility to the point of deceiving themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any kind of perception of miraculous powers belonging to Paul? No! He was dealing with individuals who had no disposition toward the miraculous. In preaching to the Gentiles, Paul was often alone, seldom more than three, as far as the written accounts reveal. If fraud were involved, Paul was in no position to solicit the magistrates, the priests, or the various sects to assist him in bringing about a fraud upon unsuspecting people. The miraculous was essential to the effectiveness of his ministry. To the Corinthians, he writes about the Spirit's power in the ministry of the apostles, which included himself:

I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. [12] The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. [13] How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong (**2 Corinthians 12:11-13**)!

The power of the Spirit is seen in Paul's ministry as one witnesses the miracle of Paul's deliverance from a poisonous snakebite on the island of Malta. Luke records this account of Paul's miraculous rescue with the following record:

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. [2] The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. [3] Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. [4] When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." [5] But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. [6] The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. [7] There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. [8] His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. [9] When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. [10] They honored us in many

ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed (**Acts 28:1-10**).

Again, one witnesses that these people were not gullible. They expected Paul to die. Earlier Paul had written to the Corinthians about this power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's power is always foremost in the heart and mind of Paul. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he goes right to the heart of his preaching and teaching: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (**1 Corinthians 2:4**). Again, this message of salvation did not originate with Paul, but it came directly from Jesus. Paul lays emphasis upon the origin of his message in his Epistle to the Galatians, which message, as already stated above, was confirmed with the miraculous. In the Epistle to the Galatians, he discloses the origin of his message about salvation in and through Jesus:

> 11 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that
> man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I
> received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my
> previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God
> and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my
> own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when
> God, who set me apart from birth[a] and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to
> reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not
> consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles
> before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to
> Damascus. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted
> with Peter[b] and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other
> apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I
> am writing you is no lie. 21 Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally
> unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the
> report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once
> tried to destroy." 24 And they praised God because of me (**Galatians 1:11-24**).

PAUL'S SECOND VINDICATION OF HIS OWN CONVERSION
Festus and Agrippa

Paul states emphatically that this Gospel he proclaimed did not arrive to him through the apostles, but rather, it was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. Paul, years later, recounts his encounter with Jesus, an encounter that brought about a complete revolution in his thinking about God's kingdom. Prior to Paul being sent to Rome, he presented his defense, in Jerusalem, before Festus. After the exchange between Paul and Festus, Festus consulted Agrippa. The very next day, Paul gives his story of his recognition of Jesus as Lord. Fortunately, Luke gives Paul's defense for his change:

> Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So
> Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider
> myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the

accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted
with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to
me patiently. 4 "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child,
from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. 5 They
have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that
according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now it
is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial
today. 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they
earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the
Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God
raises the dead? 9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to
oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in
Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in
prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a
time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to
force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign
cities to persecute them. 12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus
with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, O king,
as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing
around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice
saying to me in Aramaic,[a] 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for
you to kick against the goads.' 15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "'I am
Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 16 'Now get up and stand
on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness
of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you
from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to
open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of
Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among
those who are sanctified by faith in me.' 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not
disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to
those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they
should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That
is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have
had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and
great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said
would happen— 23 that the Christ[b] would suffer and, as the first to rise from the
dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." 24 At this
point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he
shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." 25 "I am not insane, most
excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The
king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced
that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27
King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." 28 Then Agrippa
said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be

a Christian?" [29] Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." [30] The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. [31] They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." [32] Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (**Acts 26:1-32**).

This autobiographical statement of Paul about his former rage and actions against Christians and his reason for change captures the imagination of anyone who wants the truth about Christianity. His acceptance of this new sect went against the powers that be. The contempt for Christianity by the religious leaders was universal throughout the Roman Empire. The author of this faith had been condemned as a criminal and was crucified between two thieves. This Jesus that Paul proclaimed before Agrippa and Festus was to the world "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (**1 Corinthians 1:23**). Just a casual reading of his defense before Agrippa reveals that the desire of glory was not his motive. He knew that he could not expect mercy from his former associations with the religious leaders. This speech reveals that his reason for responding to the call of Jesus was not prestige, but a vision from heaven. How did the world feel about the apostles? Listen to Paul, once more, as he gives insight as to their plight: "Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (**4:13**).

Why would Paul deny worldly fame for the Christian Way? How can one account for such an about face? Did Paul, like Moses, esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the fame of his heritage? The author of Hebrews speaks of Moses' decision to follow God in spite of the worldly fame and honor and fortune he could have had in Egypt.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. [25] He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. [26] He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. [27] By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (**Hebrews 11:24-27**).

Paul, too, chooses this mindset. Paul, in defense of his actions before Festus and Agrippa, explains his hatred at one time for the faith that he is now defending. Pay attention once more to Paul as he lays out his prior feelings and animosity against the Christian community with the following words:

[9] "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. [10] And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. [11] Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them (**Acts 26:9-11**).

From a worldly standpoint, Paul had nothing to gain, even as Moses. If one traces the missionary journeys of Paul, one quickly observes that he gave up prosperity, fame, and reputation, which he had acquired by his labors and studies. He gave up friends, relationships, and, perhaps, family members in order to follow the One from Nazareth. This conversion to Christ discloses that he had no desire for riches, notoriety, or control. This second discourse (**Acts 26**) of Paul's defense of his faith in Christ unfolds Paul's rational motive for becoming a Christian—he believed in Him. Why the change? Remember, he persecuted Christians to the day of his conversion. The only way to account for this repudiation of his earlier denials is found in his encounter with the Lord Jesus Himself. Prior to this conversion, the doctrines and interpretation of the Sacred Writings by Christians were repugnant to his sensibilities. After his conversion to the Lord Jesus, he, too, received opposition from the religious leaders. Paul was unsupported by human assistance.

Paul tells Agrippa about this event: "About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. [14] We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic" (**26:13-14**). Not only did Paul observe "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun," but his companions also saw this light. Festus accused Paul of being "mad," but Paul responded: "The king (Agrippa) is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner" (**26:26**). This event surely spread like wild fire, knowing the nature of men and women. Paul heard the voice and understood, but the others with Paul heard the voice but did not understand the words. This "light" occurred about noon. The miraculous nature of this event stunned Paul as well as those with him. If this were a fabricated story, one wonders why Paul is the only one who lost his eyesight. Why is it that only Paul understood the voice from heaven? This narrative of Paul's own account of his conversion has a ring of truth.

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF PAUL'S CONVERSION

The first account of Paul's conversion is told my Luke. Luke recorded his version of Paul's about face from Judaism to Christ in **Acts 9**. Luke minutes the events leading up to Paul's change from persecutor to persecuted. The actions that occurred after this face-to-face communication with Jesus altered his life forever. What happened to Paul was a total shock; he had no idea of meeting the Lord Jesus on this clandestine operation of his. In Luke's report, he says that Paul "fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him" (**9:4**). But then in **9:7**, he affirms, "They heard the sound but did not see anyone." This story, as told by Luke, too, has a ring of truth. This narrative of the heavenly vision was not a phantom, or apparition, but a real encounter with the risen Lord. Significantly, Paul was not alone but was accompanied by several others. Years later, Paul, in his defense before Agrippa develops this episode, which expansion of the events shows that he was not alone: "We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic" (**26:14**).

Is it possible that all of these individuals with Paul only imagined that they saw a bright light in midday? Why in midday and not at night? What about the sound? Why is it that only Paul understood the words? This apparition, or vision, did not happen at night, but in broad daylight—a time in which people are more cognizant of their senses. All of the men with him were dazed. The only way to account for this vision is that a miracle occurred. Why was Paul the only one struck blind—blind for three days? This

confrontation never left the mind of Paul. Later, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, he shared with them this most traumatic experience: "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 9:1**)? Again, Paul, in this same letter, affirms the Damascus encounter as he brings his first letter to a close: "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8] and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born" (**15:7-8**).

RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF PAUL'S DAY

Paul's preaching shocked the religious opinions of his day. Paul could reason with the Jews from their own Scriptures, which they asserted contained Divine Revelation. Many Jews were converted through study of the messianic prophecies. On the other hand, the Gentiles were another matter. All of this was new to the Gentiles as a whole; they had to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. The Gentiles expected no Christ. There is a sense in which the light of nature, even without express Revelation from God, revealed the knowledge of the One true God, even though God was not understood with the same understanding after the coming of Christ. One such example of this mindset of God's testimony about His existence is found in **Acts 14:17** by Paul: "Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

Athens

As stated earlier, Paul was no enthusiast with the negative overtones normally associated with an enthusiast. Paul's zeal was positive—warm and eager, a zeal tempered with prudence. Paul's external behavior reveals one who is concerned and compassionate toward all men. Paul became all things to all men in order that he might win souls to Christ (**1 Corinthians 9:2-22**). Paul employed various means of reaching out to the Gentiles. One such episode occurred in Athens (**Acts 17:16-34**). Paul knew that he was on precarious grounds in introducing Jesus and His resurrection to the Athenians. Athens had a law that made it a capital offense to introduce or teach about new gods. Josephus (AD 37-101) calls attention to this law in his writings against Apion:

> (37) Of the Lacedaemonians I will say no more. But the Athenians, who considered their city open to all comers—what was their attitude in this matter? Apollonius was ignorant of this, and of the inexorable penalty which they inflicted on any who uttered a single word about the gods contrary to their laws. On what other ground was Socrates put to death? He never sought to betray his city to the enemy, he robbed no temple. No; because he used to swear strange oaths and give out (in jest, surely, as some say) that he received communications from a spirit, he was therefore condemned to die by drinking hemlock. His accuser brought a further charge against him of corrupting young men, because he stimulated them to hold the constitution and laws of their country in contempt Such was the punishment of Socrates, a citizen of Athens. Anazagoras was a native of Clazomenae, but because he maintained that the sun, which the Athenians held to be a god, was an incandescent mass, he escaped by a few votes only from being condemned by them to death. They offered a talent for the head of Diagoras of Melos, because he was reported to have jeered at their mysteries. Protagoras, had he not promptly fled would have

been arrested and put to death, because of a statement about the gods in his writings which appeared to conflict with Athenian tenets. Can anyone wonder at their attitude towards men of such authority when they did not spare even women? They put Ninus the priestess to death, because someone accused her of initiating people into the mysteries of foreign gods; this was forbidden by their law, and the penalty decreed for any who introduced a foreign god was death. Those who had such a law evidently did not believe that the gods of other nations were gods; else they would not have denied themselves the advantage of increasing the number of their own.[10]

As a result of his preaching, Paul was brought before Areopagus (The ordinary judges of criminal matters, and, at the same time, entrusted with care of religion) to give a defense of his actions. Luke gives some background leading up to his appearance before the Areopagus:

> While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) [**Acts 17:16-21**].

Paul did not begin his defense or arguments from the Old Testament. He began where they were in their concept of the gods in their culture. When Paul was questioned about the introduction of some strange God, Paul did not allow this dilemma to thwart his preaching Jesus as Lord and the unveiling of the One true God. Paul had a profound sense of awe and wonder about the One who created the heavens and the earth (**17:24**). Paul, through the Holy Spirit, was able to express with human words the wonder of what lies beyond this observable life—a defense that converted some of the Athenians to the Christian faith (**17:30-31**). Paul was a man of immense moral and physical courage. He knew the philosophers of Greece, not merely as textbook subjects but rather as systems of thought being taught and practiced in his day. Paul knew that one must think seriously of what one meant by the word *god*. When questioned by the authorities about his preaching and violation of the law concerning the introduction of foreign gods, he responded:

> Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples

built by hands. [25] And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. [26] From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. [27] God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. [28] 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' [29] "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. [30] In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. [31] For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." [32] When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." [33] At that, Paul left the Council. [34] A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others (**17:22-34**).

Paul began his message of salvation with their own inscriptions "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." One witnesses Paul's testimony about God and the resurrection of the dead. This is a man who is not guilty of credulity or ignorant about Greek philosophy. This man seems to have been slow and hard in his acceptance of the Christian faith in Jesus. Even with all that transpired in Jerusalem before his conversion did not move him to belief. He was adamant in his opposition to members of the Way. Paul's mind was far from being disposed to a credulous faith. Paul set out with the authority of the chief priests, but on his way to Damascus, he encountered the living Christ. This experience, and this episode alone, changed him from unbeliever to believer. He saw a vision, not a mirage. No one could have faked this kind of happening that would have changed hatred for Christ into love for Christ. It is inconceivable that the disciples of Jesus could have plotted the midday brightness, brightness brighter than the sun?

First of all, the followers of Jesus wanted to avoid this man; they knew his mission of destruction of the Christian faith. Even Ananias, a devout Jew, was reluctant to go to Paul after his arrival in Damascus. Luke records the objections of Ananias hesitation to face a man like Paul. The following is Luke's account of his reluctance to go:

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. [11] The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. [12] In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." [13] "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. [14] And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name" (**Acts 19:10-14**).

Not only did Paul experience a vision, but Ananias also experienced a vision. Both had to experience this miracle in order to bring about God's desires. Was Paul deceived by the fraud of others? No! The miracles that occurred on this day are the reasons for his change—midday light, the voice from heaven, and blindness for three days. One can only conclude that Paul's conversion cannot be attributed to negative enthusiasm, a belief resulting from credulity or ignorance.

PAUL'S FIRST VINDICATION OF HIS OWN CONVERSION

After Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and his visit to the Temple, the authorities arrested him after being seized by the crowd, a multitude that tried to kill him (**Acts 21:17-36**). After his arrest, Paul requested from the commander permission to speak to the crowd. He received permission and spoke to the multitude in Aramaic. This is the first full account of Paul's conversion by himself. In this account, Paul begins by giving a brief biographical sketch of his early life. This short outline reveals his rage against Christians prior to his meeting Jesus on the Damascus road. Paul Himself gives an account of his own conversion—the first record of this miraculous conversion is given by Luke in **Acts 9**. Paul's personal story, as told by himself, is much fuller than the first testimony given by Luke. Luke reports this informative narrative of Paul's argument of his mission to preach Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles:

> Then Paul said: [3] "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. [4] I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, [5] as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. [6] "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. [7] I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' [8] "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. "'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. [9] My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. [10] "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' [11] My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. [12] "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. [13] He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. [14] "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. [15] You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. [16] And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name' (**22:1-16**).

CONCLUSION

Paul's conversion is an apologetic for the authenticity of Christianity. There is only one reason for believing Paul's conversion to be true, and that reason is: one cannot help but believe it is true. The evidence is overwhelming. If the truth of this conversion is to ring true within the heart of any individual, he or she must approach Paul's own testimony with sincerity and singleness of mind. If Paul's testimony is true, and it is true, then this claim upon Paul by Jesus makes an all-inclusive and absolute claim upon everyone who hears the message of salvation by grace through faith in this resurrected One. As a result of Paul's direct encounter with Jesus, he came to the realization that God had gone into action for the salvation of men and women in and through Jesus Christ. He came to the realization that with the advent of Jesus, God begins a new beginning—God's new beginning. Years after Paul's conversion, he expresses God's action for redemption in and through Jesus:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

Paul came to understand that in the Cross of Christ, one witnesses the public righteousness of God. This direct intervention on the part of Jesus led Paul to understand that the Cross is not just an impressive spectacle, but rather a decisive act—the moral order of God's holiness. Paul never lost sight of the fact that the Cross is the center of Christianity. When the Cross is not the heart of Christianity, then, in due time, Christianity loses its moral and public energy. One cannot read about Paul's own personal account of his conversion without a consciousness of his emphasis upon the kingdom of God. For Paul, the Cross is either the life of the new community of Christ, or it is its death. The preaching of Paul reveals that Christ did not come to earth as a grand spiritual personality, but as the Redeemer.

The three accounts of Paul's conversion, as found in the Book of Acts, reveal that there was no rational motive for Paul's transformation to the Way. All of Paul's comments in his two personal versions of his about face from Judaism to Christ imply some miraculous intervention on the part of Jesus that resulted in his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. When one reads Paul's account of his heat-of-zeal against Christians, even to the point of putting many to death, what could be his motive for such an abrupt change in this kind of behavior, unless he had had an actual meeting with the risen Jesus. Paul says that under these circumstances he became a disciple of Jesus. Only this confrontation with Jesus can account for his identification with one of the most hated of all sects by the religious leaders. Why would one embrace a faith that suffered such contempt? Why would one welcome a "faith" that had received such stinging derision, a disrespect that apparently was universal?

> The very author of this faith was crucified as a criminal. He was crucified between

two thieves. He died a most ignominious death. Paul captures this shameful and terrible death with the following words: "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (**Philippians 2:8**). Jesus had, so to speak, a ragtag army. Some of His disciples were former fishermen and unschooled (**Mark 1:16**; **Acts 4:13**). One of His disciples was a tax collector (**Matthew 9:9; 10:3**) and another of His disciples was a zealot (**Matthew 10:4**). Paul knew that the preaching of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (**1 Corinthians 1:23**). He chose people whom he knew to be looked upon by the world as the filth of the world.

What motivation would Paul have had for such identification with the hunted? There was no motivation for glory; no motivation for fame; no motivation for power; otherwise, he would have stayed with the religious leaders. Why did Paul choose a life of hardship if he had not actually experienced this meeting with the Lord Jesus? William Paley (1743-1805), in his book on *Evidences on Christianity*, had this to say about Paul's conversion: "The consistency of St. Paul's character throughout the whole of his history (viz. the warmth and activity of his zeal, first against, and then for Christianity) carries with it very much of the appearance of truth."[11]

Remember, as stated earlier, Paul graphically depicts his life of suffering after conversion to the Corinthians, a life that makes one stand in awe if the conversion did not happen the way Paul said it happened. This life of pain and anguish he chose was not a life of rags to riches, but rather a life of riches to rags. In conclusion to this study as to the authenticity of Paul's conversion from Judaism to Christianity, one needs to read and reread the following words of Paul as he pours out his heart concerning the life he chose over again fame and honor. Pay attention to Paul as he describes and explains his life after his acceptance of Jesus:

> For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. [10] We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! [11] To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. [12] We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; [13] when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (**1 Corinthians 4:9-13**).

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[1] See Elgin Moyer, revised and enlarged by Earle E. Cairns, *Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 252, where it is stated:

Lyttelton, George, First Baron Lyttelton (1709-1773), English statesman and man of letters, son of Sir Thomas Lyttelton, born at Hagley, Worcestershire, England, studied at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, but took no degrees. Elected to the House of commons in 1735, where he was a member until 1756, when elevated to the House of Lords. Lord commissioner of the treasury from 1744 to 1754 and chancellor of the exchequer the next two years. When about thirty-eight, he began a serious and honest study to ascertain the truth of Christianity. The result was conviction of the truth, his conversion, and writing of *observations of the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*.

[2] Ibid., 429, where Moyer says,

WEST, GILBERT (1703-1756). English writer; born at Wickham, Kent, England; educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. Served for a time in the Royal Army. Dr. Johnson included West in his *Lives of the Poets.* Noted especially for his writing *Observation on the Resurrection*, the writing of which is said to have led to his conversion; won for him a high reputation, and from Oxford the degree D.C.L. His relatives William Pitt and George Lyttelton often visited in his home; he carried on extensive correspondence with Philip Doddrige.

[3] *Infidelity*: Comprising *Jenyns' Internal Evidence. Leslie's Method, Lyttlelton's Conversion on Paul, Watson's Reply to Gibbon and Paine, A Notice of Hume on Miracles and an Extract From West on the Resurrection* (New York, The American Tract Society, nd), 2.

[4] Lord Lyttleton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Paul*, third edition (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1747), 116 pages; Gilbert West, *Observations of the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1749), 456 pages. I, Dallas Burdette, have originals of these two books in my personal library.

[5] Frank Morrison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, 1930 (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, nd).

[6] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943, 1952).

[7] Ibid., 40, 41.

[8] George Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Paul* (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1742), 69.

[9] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

a Or *from my mother's womb*

a That is, Peter

b Or *in*; also in verse 15

a Or *hold on to*

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God's mystery*

a Greek *unclean*

a Or *from my mother's womb*

b Greek *Cephas*

[a] Or *Hebrew*

[b] Or *Messiah*

[10] Josephus, *The Life Against Apion*, 2: 37, with an English translation by H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, vol., 186 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1997), .397, 399, 401.

a Or *be a sin offering*

[11] William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, in three parts, firth edition, Vol., 2 (London: R. Faulder, 1776; reprint, England: Gregg International Publishers, 1970), 102.

The Credibility and Candor of the New Testament Writers

Thrust Statement: **Since the writers of the New Testament were not disposed toward deception, they recorded the events as they actually happened.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Peter 1:12-16**

If someone were to ask you why you believe the Bible, how would you respond? How do you know that the Bible is the Word of God? This essay is designed to deal with such an inquiry. One answer to this valid question is: the credibility and candor and forthrightness and honesty of the writers in reporting events that one would leave out if one were seeking to perpetrate, or pull off, a fraud. Why do you believe the Bible? Just a casual reading of the New Testament books reveals the genuineness of the twenty-seven books that originated from the pens of those who were directly involved with the ministry of Jesus or with those who were indirectly caught up with those who had had a personal encounter with the One who entered history. These writings have a ring of truth that no other writings in the entire world have.

The openness of the writers jumps out with authenticity. If the authors of the New Testament writers wanted to carry out a hoax upon unsuspecting individuals, they would not have inserted comments that would have lead one to question the veracity of their claims about Jesus. Throughout the New Testament, these writers focused on the One who died for the sins of humanity and was raised on the third day. Peter, one of Jesus' closest companions and one of the Twelve, toward the end of his life, wrote his second epistle to reinforce the genuineness of the Christian faith by calling attention to the fact that the Twelve were eyewitnesses to the events reported in the New Testament. Listen to Peter as he recounts these events:

> So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. [13] I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, [14] because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. [15] And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to

remember these things. [16] We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty (**2 Peter 1:12-16**).[1]

Peter gave first-hand testimony concerning the ministry of Jesus. Can one rely upon the testimony of one who was directly associated with Jesus? Is his testimony, as well as of the other apostles, credible? As one seeks to evaluate the credibility and candor of the New Testament writers, one discovers that these men put down many comments that no writer who wanted to pull-the-wool over someone's eyes would have ever forged. If one were seeking to carry out a swindle, or scam, one would have avoided the many negative comments about themselves as His disciples and would have carved and molded the particulars concerning the ministry of Jesus and themselves to bring about the most desired results—conviction. Yet, in spite of their defects, one still observes an air of truth in the testimony of those who were with Jesus during His earthly ministry. One also detects an air of truth in the various compositions composed by the writers of the New Testament books. Why did they write the way they did if they wished to pull off a fraud? This essay is a brief survey of some things written by these writers that give validity to their testimony. In explaining the honesty and candor of the writers of the New Testament, there will be repetition in some of the various subheadings. This repetition will only reinforce the thrust of this paper—the integrity and candor of the writers.

RESURRECTION
Limited to His Friends

The various accounts of the resurrection of Jesus strengthen the candor of the New Testament writers. Just a laid-back reading of the various narratives dealing with the resurrection of Jesus is one such incident that leads toward the unbelievable, especially if His disciples wanted to avoid rejection of one of the most important events in the history of the world. If one wanted to convince the world of Jesus' resurrection, one wonders why the resurrection appearances were limited to His disciples, and not to the world at large. Why did He not appear to Pilate after His resurrection? Why did He not appear before the leaders of Israel after His resurrection? Why did He not appear before the Scribes and Pharisees after His resurrection? Why did He not appear before Caiaphas the high priest? Why did He not appear to the guards that mocked Him? It seems that the resurrection of Jesus would have had more clout if He had shown Himself alive to these individuals. Surely, the resurrection of Jesus would have had more believability if He had reported to foes as well as to His friends, but such was not the situation.

God did not reveal to His community of believers His reason for not appearing before the religious leaders of Israel. Would His appearance have convinced them of their reprehensible deed of putting to death the Son of God? Had they not witnessed the many miracles of Christ, but still did not believe? Did they not have Moses and the prophets? In the Gospel accounts, one witnesses the very opposite of what one would expect. The Gospel writers agree that after His resurrection He appeared to only His disciples. One such well-known example of the fairness of the evangelists in reporting their accounts concerning the resurrection is found in the Book of Acts:

We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in

> Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, [40] but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. [41] He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (**Acts 10:39-41**).[2]

Peter, in his discourse to Cornelius, calls attention to the limited number of witnesses concerning the resurrection of God's Son. This statement is quite remarkable for its integrity. If they had written after His resurrection that He appeared to His enemies as well as to His friends, this would have added more weight to the claims of His resurrection, at least in the eyes of some. Unquestionably, if they had fabricated the resurrection story, they would have rendered their narratives concerning this event as unobjectionable as possible. If the narratives were false, they would have omitted references to Christ's resurrection as having occurred to His disciples alone. This restriction of resurrection appearances did not keep them from reporting the historical facts surrounding His appearances after His resurrection. Instead of negative reaction toward His resurrection, this candor of the Gospel writers adds weight to their credibility and to the nature of the evidence. This effect is something that the evangelists would not have foreseen, so it seems to me, at the time of writing.

CRUFIXION
Disadvantageous to Christ As the Son of God

As one reflects upon the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus, one is immediately confronted with the impartiality of the facts reported by the writers of the New Testament. None of His disciples sought to omit any of the events surrounding the crucifixion that was, in actuality, disadvantageous to their beliefs concerning Jesus as the One sent from God. This frankness, or candor, about the death of Jesus is another argument for the credibility and honesty of the authors of the New Testament writings. No one sought to embellish, or overdo, the life of Christ in order to make the story of Jesus more credible to unbelievers. If the events did not happen as reported by His disciples, one wonders why they were so outspoken about statements that would deter belief in the Son of God by those not willing to examine the evidence.

If the writers wanted to bolster their belief about Jesus as the Anointed One of God, they could have fabricated other stories concerning Jesus disappearance. If the story of Jesus had been a contrivance, surely they would not have thought of recommending to the Jews a person who their Jewish rulers condemned and rejected. On the other hand, one also wonders why the writers of the New Testament would have set forth one as the redeemer of humanity, especially when the Gentiles, too, disowned and crucified Him. Both the Jewish nation as well as the Gentiles rejected him. Could the disciples have come up with a more plausible explanation for His absence? For example, the disciples could have drawn from the Old Testament two stories that might have had more clout—the translation of Enoch and the assumption of Elijah (**2 Kings 2:11-12**). Would not the miraculous whirlwind that took Elijah have carried more weight than a crucifixion? Would this story have made more sense than a crucifixion?

Surely, the writers of the New Testament would not have overlooked such an important point if they had wished to perpetrate a fraud upon the people. The telling of

the crucifixion could be nothing short of telling the actuality of the facts as they occurred. The crucifixion was a problem to both Jew and Gentile. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians called attention to the negative effect that the crucifixion had upon both: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (**1 Corinthians 1:23**). Would not the story of Enoch or Elijah have been more glorious than a crucifixion? Is it possible that the story of these two men were overlooked? If His disciples had wanted to recommend to Jews and Gentiles, this scenario of either Enoch or Elijah would have made the story of Jesus more palatable. Yet, this was not done. They reported the facts as they actually occurred. Had the story of Christ's crucifixion been invented, these particulars would not have been a part of this story. If this story had been a fiction, the crucifixion would never have been a part of this story.

THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS
Character and Conduct

The disciples of Jesus did not seek to hide their lack of comprehension and unbelief concerning the resurrection of Jesus. If the crucifixion and resurrection were a made-up story, they would not have left themselves open to such criticism. Their self-disclosures reveal their candor. One detects a "ring of truth" in their writings. One cannot read the accounts of the crucifixion in the four Gospels without reflection upon the conduct of His twelve disciples. Prior to the crucifixion, they entertained strong emotions about Jesus as the Promised One as foretold by the prophets. They heard Him speak with authority, not as the teachers of the Law; they witnessed many wonderful works performed by Him; they witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead. With the crucifixion, His disciples, like John the Baptist, had doubts, in spite of the miraculous in the ministry of Jesus and their ability to also perform miracles. The words of Jesus to the disciples of John the Baptist sets the tone for the events witnessed by His disciples. For instance, Matthew gives his commentary on the words of John and then gives Jesus' response:

> After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there
> to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.[a] 2 When John heard in prison what
> Christ was doing, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who was
> to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and
> report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk,
> those who have leprosy[b] are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the
> good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away
> on account of me." (**Matthew 11:1-6**)

These miraculous events proved beyond doubt that Jesus was the One He claimed to be—the Son of God. Shortly before Jesus decided to return to Jerusalem, He and His disciples were in the region of Caesarea Philippi (**Matthew 16:13a**). Jesus took this opportunity to ask His disciples about His true identity. Before asking His disciples this vital question about His person, He inquired as to the beliefs of the people—"Who do people say the Son of Man is" (**16:13b**). After their response to the first question, He then asked them what they thought. Without hesitation, Peter answered with exactness: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). In spite of this answer, one later

witnesses fear and doubt by His disciples after His arrest and trial and crucifixion. After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Eleven as well as to hundreds of His believers (**I Corinthians 15:6**).

The disciples entertained the same prejudices of the Jews concerning the establishment of an earthly kingdom. After the resurrection, Luke writes: "So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel" (**Acts 1:6**)? The Eleven, like the Jews, were still looking for an earthly reign of the Messiah. Jesus responded by saying, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (**1:7-8**). Just a casual glance at the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John reveal that they did not whitewash their doubts; but rather, they exhibited their skepticism concerning His resurrection. If they were reporting fiction, they would not have laid themselves open to such unbelief, especially since they were trying to convince people of the truth of Jesus as the Promised Messiah. It is significant that prior to this last appearance, one also catches a glimpse of the disappointment over the death of Jesus in the Book of Luke. Luke reveals a conversation that took place between Jesus and two of His disciples that had just been told by the women about the resurrection of Jesus. Pay attention to Luke as he unfolds this story of unbelief to belief:

> Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles[a] from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ[b] have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (**Luke 24:13-27**)

As stated above, if the story of the crucifixion had been invented, none of these particulars would have been a part of the story of Jesus. Not only do the Twelve reveal

their lack of knowledge concerning the true nature of the Messianic kingdom, but, at the same time, they reveal their own character and conduct, which, at first sight, appears to be disadvantageous to their cause—converting people to Jesus as the Messiah promised by the prophets. Just a perusal of the writings that compose the New Testament reveals that His disciples did not seek to soften or conceal their behavior or lack of faith. Neither did they weaken the harshness or severity of the reprimands of Jesus concerning their lack of comprehension or conduct. Surely, if they had wished to carry out a deception about the Christ, they would have kept secret their shortcomings. Had the story about Jesus been invented, one doubts if the various particulars would have ever been a part of their narratives. For example, they did not hide their material ambition for places of honor in a temporal kingdom. Matthew reports this incident with the story of the mother of two of His disciples—the sons of Zebedee, James and John (**Matthew 20:20-23; 10:2**).

Upon the other ten learning of this maneuver, "they were indignant with the two brothers" (**20:24**, see also **Mark 10:35-45**). One cannot read these two accounts without a consciousness that the twelve were infected with ambitious views of honor in a temporal kingdom, a view that was not correct. One witnesses demanding ambition on the part of James and John's mother. Were the two brothers behind this plot? If not, one wonders why the ten were so "indignant with the two brothers" (**Matthew 20:24**). Again, one sees the honesty of Matthew as he reports the disciples' lack of faith during a storm. What is amazing is that the disciples had witnessed a man cured of leprosy (**8:1-4**), the healing of a centurion's daughter (**8:5-13**), and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law and the healing of many others (**8:14-17**). One stands in awe at the unbelief of the apostles after witnessing so many therapeutic miracles. Matthew did not hide the fears and doubts about their safety when they were in a storm (**8:23-27**). Their behavior received a stern reprimand from Jesus: "You of little faith, why are you so afraid" (**8:26**)? With the calming of the storm, this action caused the disciples to respond with amazement: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him" (**8:27**)!

On another occasion, one sees a stern rebuke from Jesus concerning their misunderstanding about His remarks concerning the "yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**16:6**). Following these remarks, the disciples discussed this among themselves (**16:7**). Matthew then records Jesus' remarks against him and the other eleven for their failure to comprehend the true import of His warning:

> You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? [9] Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? [10] Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? [11] How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (**16:8-11**)

Matthew does not hide their failure to understand the truth about this One who has power over nature. He says, " Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (**16:12**). Mark, in his Gospel, reports even stronger words against their

failure to understand:

> "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? [18] Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? [19] When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. [20] "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." [21] He said to them, "Do you still not understand?" (**Mark 8:17-21**)

Another significant confession, or admission, reported by Mark, surrounds the lack of ability, on the part of His disciples, to cast out an evil spirit. Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John had just come down from the Mount of Transfiguration, encountered His disciples arguing with the teachers of the Law. During the event, Jesus cast out the deaf and dumb spirit. Later, His disciples questioned Jesus as to why they failed to exorcise this spirit (**9:28**). Surely, if one were seeking to pull off a hoax, His disciples would not have disclosed their own failures. One observes complete honesty on the part of frail men, men who were struggling to gain clear insight. The disciples did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of humanity. In fact, Peter tried to prevent the crucifixion, which action received a strong rebuke from Jesus: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**Matthew 16:23**).

Another disclosure surrounds Jesus walking on water with an invitation from Jesus to Peter to walk on water (**14:22-36**). In spite of the negative overtones concerning Peter, nevertheless, Matthew writes about this incident as a historical fact. Not only did he jot down this incident, but he also gives Jesus' strong rebuke for Peter's lack of trust: "Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt'" (**14:31**)? None of the writers of the New Testament sought to set the Twelve disciples in the most favorable light to the people. One observes impartiality of the reporting of the history on the part of the writers of the New Testament. If the demeanor of the apostles had been improved in order to gain a more favorable hearing, one might question as to falsification of the historical data.

JOHN THE BAPTIST
Doubts About Jesus as the Messiah

If the writers of the New Testament were bent on fraud concerning the Messiahship of Jesus as the Savior of the world, one wonders why both Matthew and Luke included John the Baptist's negative thoughts about the true identity of Jesus as the Coming One. After John's arrest, Matthew gives some insight as to his mental state: "When John (the Baptist) heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples [3] to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else'" (**Matthew 11:2-3,** see also **Luke 7:18)**? If Matthew and Luke wanted to create a sham, surely these two writers would have kept their comments to John the Baptist's confession about the Christ to themselves. In light of this inquiry, one cannot help but reflect upon John's positive attitude concerning the identity of Jesus. For instance, earlier, John told two of his disciples that Jesus was "the Lamb of God" (**John 1:35**). Also, just a

day earlier, John the apostle writes about John the Baptist's comments about Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**1:29**)!

Without doubt, the recording of John's reservations concerning the character of Jesus could not help but have a negative effect on unbelievers, or enemies of Christ. This kind of damaging comments about John's doubts could only add fuel to the fire in one's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Yet, truth and honesty could not afford to hide John's inward mental condition. Neither Matthew nor Luke withheld this harmful information. Again, one witnesses a "ring of truth" in the narratives concerning John's positive and negative statements.

JUDAS ISCARIOT
Betrays Jesus

Judas, one of the original Twelve disciples, is an anomaly among His disciples. Judas received the same commission and healing powers that the other eleven received, even the power to raise the dead. Matthew records the mission of the Twelve:

> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,[b] drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. (**Matthew 10:5-8**)

In spite of the ability to accomplish these miracles, Judas still betrayed the Master for thirty pieces of silver. During his travels with Jesus, Judas had witnessed the feeding of four thousand men, which count did not include the women and children, with just seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. This feeding of such a large number with such a small amount of food was not the only miracle. For instance, following this episode of feeding several thousand, the disciples picked up "seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over" (**15:37**).

Once more, prior to this event, Judas has just witnessed numerous healings by Jesus (**15:30-31**). He was with Jesus throughout His ministry, even to eating the final Passover meal with the Master. In spite of approximately three and one-half years with Jesus, He ultimately betrayed the One who performed so many miracles that even another of His disciples exclaimed: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (**John 21:25**). Judas, too, knew this truth. In addition to all these miracles, Judas also witnessed the raising of Lazarus from the dead (**11:1-44**). Again, Mark records an incidence in which Jesus calms a storm. This was such a remarkable feat that His disciples, which included Judas, exclaimed: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him" (**Mark 4:41**)!

What is so amazing about Judas is that he witnessed all these events and still betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders. Yet, in spite of his being one of the Twelve, Mark did not fail to record this failure. Mark writes with candor as he unfolds this terrible

disloyalty by one of His own:

> Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. (**Mark 14:43-50**).

Not only did Mark in his Gospel take note of the failure of one of the Twelve, but he also revealed that the rest of His disciples deserted and fled. If the writers of the New Testament wanted to carry out a deception, one cannot help but wonder why they would have documented such a negative comment about the Twelve, especially the treachery of one of their own (Judas). One can only believe the testimony of the Apostles and those associated with the Apostles. They detailed the facts as they took place without regard to the negative overtones that the enemies of Christ might latch onto. From what one knows about human character, it is impossible, so it seems, that these men in their circumstances could have persevered as they did in the assertion of a falsehood. Their enemies were ready to pounce on them for any inconsistencies of misinformation. They had no choice other than to report the facts as they actually occurred. One does not discern any coloring of the facts in order to sway individuals to their side. One observes absolute candor on the part of the writers of the New Testament books.

ANECDOTES FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Desertion of Some Disciples

How does one account for the anecdotes, or stories, found in the New Testament that convey negative overtones about Jesus if the writers were bent on dealing with suppression and disguise? For example, John records the following statement about the desertion of many of His disciples: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him (**John 6:66**). Is it logical that John would have recorded such an event if he were seeking to suppress or camouflage the true facts surrounding Jesus' mission to the world?

Not Many Miracles Because of Unbelief

Yet again, if one were trying to suppress one's beliefs concerning the true identity of Jesus, one wonders why Matthew would have recorded the following statement: "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (**Matthew 13:58**). This comment follows an episode that occurred during one of Jesus' visits to His own hometown. On this occasion the people expressed amazement at His wisdom and miraculous powers. In spite of that, even His wisdom and miraculous healings did not create belief. Matthew goes right to the heart of their rejection: "And they took offense at

him" (**13:57**). If one were disposed toward deception, or dishonesty, one wonders if Matthew would have disclosed this kind of information.

Governor Festus: Speaks Disparagingly of Jesus and Paul

Dr. Luke, author and companion of Paul, records Paul's encounter with Festus (**Acts 25:1-12**), which record reveals a startling statement by the governor himself. In this meeting, Paul gives his defense against the chief priest and the Jewish leaders (**25:2, 8-11**). As one peruses this narrative, one detects a testimony that is open and above board in reporting the facts. Surely, if Luke had been a dishonest narrator, he would have withheld Festus' negative statements concerning the belief in Jesus and the Resurrection of the one whom Paul claimed to be alive. A fraudulent narrator would not have represented his cause with such a downbeat statement from a government representative in terms that were disparaging, or disapproving, with apathy and indifference about Jesus and His resurrection. On the other hand, this encounter would have afforded Luke with an opportunity to put belief in Jesus in the most favorable light from a governor in order to bring about conviction in Jesus and His resurrection, but he did not. Thus, Luke in his narration states with honesty the remarks of one who could care less about this one called Jesus. Listen to Luke as he reveals Festus' desire to have King Agrippa to listen to Paul, along with his critical remarks:

> A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. [14] Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. [15] When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. [16] "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. [17] When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. [18] When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. [19] Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive (**Acts 25:13-19**).

SAYINGS OF JESUS

Faith to Remove Mountains

Toward the end of Christ's ministry upon the earth, Matthew records an incident concerning the withering of a fig tree before His disciples' eyes. They were amazed that the tree withered so quickly following the words of Jesus: "May you never bear fruit again" (**Matthew 21:19**)! The disciples asked: "How did the fig tree wither so quickly" (**21:20**)? The following comments appear very improbable if He had not actually spoken the words:

> I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw

yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. [22] If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (**21:21**)

The term "faith," no doubt, is rightly interpreted as that "internal notice" by which the apostles were admonished concerning their power to perform any particular miracle. Paul, a later convert to Christianity, spoke of the power to perform "signs, wonders and miracles" as a mark of an apostle (**2 Corinthians 12:12**). The words of Jesus carry with them a difficulty, a difficulty that no writer would have brought upon himself if this saying were not authentic.

Dead Bury Their Dead

One is once more confronted with a saying that is harsh and repulsive: "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (**Luke 9:60**). Even though this response by Jesus to one who expressed a desire to follow Him is, on the surface, unsympathetic and revolting, if this statement did not occur, why would Luke put this saying into the mouth of Jesus. This statement, at first glance, appears to be unsympathetic and heartless toward natural feelings for the death of a father. In this scenario, Jesus told a man to "Follow me" (**9:59a**). The man replied by saying, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father" (**9:59b**). If Jesus had not actually made this discourse, one wonders why the Luke would have recorded a statement that rings with ruthlessness and insensitivity. Again, one witnesses candor and honesty in reporting the sayings of Jesus in spite of the negative overtones that the enemies of Christianity might latch on to.

Controversial Statement in John 6

In John, chapter 6, one reads of Jesus feeding five thousand with "five small barley loaves and two small fish" (**John 6:8**), Jesus walking on water (**6:16-24**), and Jesus' assertion about His being the bread of life (**6:35**). This third episode is what created a great deal of attention among many of His disciples. The saying that created havoc on this occasion was spoken in a synagogue while in Capernaum:

I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. [55] For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. [56] Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. [57] Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. [58] This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever. (**6:53-58**).

John reports the reaction to this testimonial by Jesus: "On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it'" (**6:60**)? Jesus then entered into a dialogue with them over His declaration (**6:61-64**). This further discussion resulted in Jesus' declaration: "Yet there are some of you who do not believe" (**6:64**). John then reports the reaction of the crowd: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (**6:66**). Just a casual reading of this section of Scripture reveals an obscurity surrounding this public statement of Jesus. It is almost impossible to believe

that one of His disciples would have reported such an incident if it had not actually happened. This discourse was difficult to understand at the time and created disbelief on the part of some. Again, one sees the honesty and candor of the New Testament writers. One who was an eyewitness to the event reports this episode.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Before one looks at the various accounts of the Lord's Super, which accounts bears internal testimony as to the truthfulness of the various narratives, the Lord's Supper gives testimony as to the historical accuracy of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is one of the most powerful testimonies as to the authenticity of the first eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. When one wishes to verify the genuineness of testimony, especially testimony that occurred over two thousand years ago, there are four criteria that must be met in order to give credence, beyond doubt, to the factuality of the event, or events. First, the actions reported must be *sensible* facts; that is to say, the facts must be such that the eyes of spectators, along with his or her other senses—hearing, tasting, smelling, feeling—must be cognizant of. Second, the alleged facts must be available to the scrutiny of the public; in other words, the facts must be exhibited under circumstances of extraordinary publicity that one cannot deny. Third, there must be certain monumental and commemorative institutions continuing from the time of the reported events to the present as a perpetual attestation to the historicity and factuality of the reported facts. And last, but not least, the monumental proofs, or commemorative institutions, existed simultaneously with the events that the commemorative institutions are intended to perpetuate, that is, the institutions (for example, the Egyptian Passover, the Lord's Supper, baptism, and so on) continue in existence up to the present hour. The Lord's Supper fits all of the above criteria and testifies to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

The various accounts of this institution bears strong internal testimony as to the genuineness of the events represented in this institution. In other words, if it had been a fraud, the accounts, so it seems, would have been more complete. Just a casual reading of the accounts in the Gospels reveals that the authors did not give all the data surrounding the celebration of the Passover rite—a rite instituted 1500 years earlier to commemorate the exodus from Egyptian bondage, which rite gives validity to the story as reported by Moses. In the Gospel of Matthew, one does not read even the command to repeat the ordinance. This silence leans toward honesty in reporting the occasion. If the numerous accounts of the Lord's Supper involved a fraud, one cannot help but wonder why His disciples reported a very difficult saying: "Take and eat; this is my body" (**Matthew 26:26**). If this Eucharist had been a made-up story, surely they would have avoided such a controversial statement. One can only surmise that no writer would have cast his readers with such a difficulty. Just a perusal of the various New Testament writers reveals that the authors did not throw in remarks to anticipate objections. If one is seeking to perpetrate a fraud, one is conscious of the need to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative. It does not appear that this perception came into the mind of the New Testament writers as to how this action would appear to both believers and enemies. Again, one sees the candor and honesty of the writers reporting the historical facts as they occurred.

EXTREME NATURALNESS OF VARIOUS STORIES

Father's Love

Just a casual reading of the healing of a boy with an evil spirit is expressed with an air of reality, which reality could hardly be counterfeited. One cannot read this story without standing in awe of the way the events are related. A certain man—he is not named—came to Jesus requesting the healing of his son (**Mark 9:17**). He requested Jesus to take pity on the boy (**9:22**). Jesus responded by saying, "Everything is possible for him who believes" (**9:23**). The father's reply has an "air of reality," which answer negates a made-up story. Listen to the father: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief" (**9:24**). His comeback has a ring of truth flashing like neon lights.

Acceptance and Rejection

Matthew does not hide the seemingly contradictory behavior of the people in Jerusalem. In the final week of Jesus' earthly life, He and His disciples approached Jerusalem (**Matthew 21:1**) with a triumphal entry. Jesus, upon arrival, instructed His disciples to go to a certain village to bring back a donkey with her colt (**21:2-3**). Upon their return, they placed their cloaks on them and Jesus rode on them (**21:7**). Matthew notes Christ's acceptance by the crowd:

> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna[b] to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"[c] "Hosanna[d] in the highest!" 10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" 11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (**21:8-11**)

Shortly after this episode of praise, Matthew reports the arrest of Jesus and His trial. During the trial, Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted Barabbas or Jesus crucified (**27:20**). One stands amazed at the fickleness, or indecisiveness, of the crowd in such a short period of time. Listen to Matthew as he unfolds their flip-flop behavior:

> But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" (**27:20-22**)

One does not detect fraud in this story. In fact, one observes the lack of pretension and genuineness of this revealing story. If Matthew wanted to perpetrate a fraud about the true identity of Jesus, one wonders why he would have listed such positive and negative behavior back-to-back. Again, one observes an air of reality, a reality that could hardly be counterfeited.

Teachers of the Law and Pharisees

John did not hide the rejection of Jesus as the Son of God by many of the religious leaders. This admission is another example of the candor and honesty of the New Testament writers. Many of the religious leaders rejected Christ while many of the common people accepted Him. John sets forth the attitude of some religious leaders as they sought to put to rest once-for-all the belief that Jesus is the one that the prophets foretold would come. Pay attention to John as he lays bare the prejudice of the leaders:

> 45 Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" 46 "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. 47 "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. 48 "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? 49 No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, 51 "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" 52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet[a] does not come out of Galilee." (**John 7:45-52**)

Yet again, one observes the openness of this story, no pretentiousness. If John wanted to pull off a hoax, one wonders why he did not embellish his story to include the religious leaders as followers of Jesus. None of His followers ever sought to cover up the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders. They reported the facts as they actually occurred. These men were eyewitnesses of the events that they testify to.

CONCLUSION

The above Scripture citations provide satisfactory proof of the truth and the reality of Christianity. One is conscious that the events recorded in the New Testament were not forged or invented, but faithful narratives of the facts as they occurred. Those who were eyewitnesses of the wonderful words left their testimony as to the truthfulness of the events as observed by their senses. Since Christians today do not see miracles performed for the confirmation of Christianity, therefore, believers must seek other avenues in which to verify the truthfulness of the first witnesses to the facts reported. Luke asserts that he himself had "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (**Luke 1:3**). John also writes:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. (**1 John 1:1-3**)

In the various accounts, the narrators inserted characters and geographical boundaries that testify as to the accounts as real history. Also, the books passed on to future generations bear the name of the authors of the books. For examples of historical persons mentioned, listen to the various accounts:

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. [2] (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) [3] And everyone went to his own town to register. (**Luke 2:1-3**)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem [2] and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east[b] and have come to worship him." [3] When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. [4] When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ[c] was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied. (**Matthew 2:1-5**)

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— [2] during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. [3] He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (**Luke 3:1-3**)

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, [2] and he said to his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." [3] Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, [4] for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." [5] Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet. (**Matthew 14:1-5**)

These Scriptures are marks of time since they give the appearance of a true history of facts, not fiction. The facts surrounding Christianity do not carry in them any temptation to forgery or invention. The events reported in the four Gospels are very natural and probable. The heart of the Gospels reports Jesus' discourses and His miracles and His resurrection. One is also introduced to the reactions—both negative and positive—of the people. The castigation of the religious leaders for their character and principles was well known to the people in the first century. One observes a full disclosure of their external behavior in the Gospels. The various stories as introduced above can be nothing else but a bare representation of actual events as they transpired during Jesus' ministry.

The representation of the apprehensiveness of the disciples concerning the Savior is extremely natural as found in the Gospels. The impartiality of the history of the New Testament is another argument of its truth. The writers did not omit those things that were really disadvantageous to themselves. In other words, the disciples reported their own characters and conduct. Had the stories been invented, these particulars would never have been a part of their written record. Had the story about Christianity been a fiction, a crucifixion would certainly have never been a part of the story. If they had made their stories more favorable, one might question as to falsification of the so-called facts. As one reads the various Epistles by His disciples, one observes many particulars not very honorable to the first Christian converts. Still, they did not withhold such information. One stands in awe at the remarkable simplicity and plainness of the New Testament writers. The writers did not seek out occasions to enhance Jesus' honor. The openness of

the New Testament writers, as stated above, jumps out with authenticity. Their honesty and candor give credence to their testimony.

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[1] *All Scripture citations are from the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] *All Scripture citations are from the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

a Greek *in their towns*

b The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

a Greek *sixty stadia* (about 11 kilometers)

b Or *Messiah*; also in verse 46

b The Greek word was used for various diseases affecting the skin—not necessarily leprosy.

b A Hebrew expression meaning ``Save!'' which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15

c Psalm 118:26

d A Hebrew expression meaning ``Save!'' which became an exclamation of praise; also in verse 15

a Two early manuscripts *the Prophet*

a Traditionally *Wise Men*

b Or *star when it rose*

c Or *Messiah*

In the eighteen hundreds, Alexander Campbell addressed the idea of the existence of God in terms of where the idea of God originated. Since everyone has a concept of God, the question is: where did this idea come from? This is the query of Campbell to a group of atheists' publishers, publishers of a magazine called New Harmony Gazette.

A PROBLEM

To the Editors of the New Harmony Gazette

> You think that reason cannot originate the idea of an Eternal First Cause, or that no man could acquire such an idea by the employment of his senses and reason—and you think correctly. You think also that the Bible is not a supernatural revelation—not a revelation from a Deity in any sense. These things premised, gentlemen, I present my problem in the form of a query again.
>
> The Christian idea of an Eternal First Cause uncaused, or of a God, is now in the world, and has been for ages immemorial. You say it could not enter into the world by reason, and it did not enter by revelation. Now, as you are philosophers and historians, and have all the means of knowing, how did it come into the world?[1]

The Christian idea of an Eternal First Cause uncaused is the only answer for human existence. The question that confronts everyone is: how did men and women come into existence. One knows that men and women did not make themselves. If they did not make themselve, then one must ask himself or herself the above question: how did men and women come into existence? The answer: God created Adam and Eve. Another question that one is confronted with in his or her search for God: where did the idea of God come from? The answer: God revealed Himself through revelation. Neither man nor woman could have originated the concept of God through imagination or reason. Why? Humanity lives in a world of five worlds—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling. It is quite evident that human beings could not have invented the idea of God through the five senses. The idea of God had to come from outside the sphere of this world of time and space. It is through the five senses that men and women acquire his or her ideas of the universe; it is not through the senses that one's idea, or concept, of God exists. Men and women could never, without the aid of Divine Revelation, have originated the idea of Deity. God revealed Himself to Adam and Eve, and this revelation came to Adam and Eve through direct disclosure from God, not Adam's and Eve's five senses. God's existence had to came to both through direct revelation, not through the five worlds of nature.

After God revealed Himself through direct interaction, one then sees God in creation. The five senses, in and of themselves, do not reveal the existence of God by themselves. God had first to reveal Himself through revelaton. Today, all humanity has some concept of God, which notion came through God disclosing Himself to Adam and Eve. Once God unveiled Himself, mankind is then able to see evidence of God's existence and creation. For example, within the five senses of humanity, one discovers design, which design suggests the idea of supreme intelligence. Without the sense of **smell**, life often times would be destroyed. Next to smell is that of **taste**. Through the world of taste, one is able to discriminate between that which is agreeable or disagreeable to health.

The Author of nature wisely ordered the locale, or geographical location, of the sense taste. If this sense had been located somewhere else, this world would be valueless to humankind. Within this world of taste, one is also cognizant that saliva is associated with the world of taste. This action enables the tongue to discriminate the qualities of the food, or substance, as pleasing or displeasing. **Feeling** is another world of humanity that exhibits design in creation. One, through this sense, is able to determine the roughness, smootness, hardness, softness, coolness, hotness, and so on, of objects, which ability is essential to one's well being. If one were born without these three avenues of intelligence, these three worlds would be closed and one would remain forever in ignorance. Without these three worlds, one could never originate the idea of material tangibility, that is to say, something that is sensible, touchable, verifiable, graspable, well-rounded, and so on.

The fourth world of the five senses is **hearing**. With this faculty, one is able to discriminate vibrations and motions of the air. Every impression made upon the outward ear reaches the middle ear. If one is born deaf, that person has no idea of the nature of sound; therefore, this one cannot learn the art of speaking. One who is deficient of this world of hearing cannot communicate his or her ideas to others. Finally, the fifth world is **seeing**. This world is one of the most perfect and delightful of all senses. This is the avenue of intelligence through which all one's ideas of color, magnitude, and distance are derived. The impressions made upon this sense reach the sensorium, or brain, through the optic nerve. One's ideas of colors, sounds, odors, tastes, and touch are derived through these five senses.

Why is this study of the five senses important in answering the question: where did the idea of God come from? It is obvious that there is nothing in the five senses that could have revealed God without God first having revealed Himself through Divine Revelation. One could not acquire such knowledge without revelation from God. It would be just as rational to talk of seeing by the hand, or hearing by the tongue, as for one to talk of knowing God without a communication from God Himself. What is revelation? Revelation cannot be applied to anything done upon the earth. It is a communication of something that the person to whom it is revealed did not know before. Revelation is supernatural. It means Divine communication concerning spiritual and eternal things—a knowledge that one could never have attained by the exercise of his or her reason upon material, or sensible, objects. The human intellect has no creative powers. It can only rearrange in new images the data already received through the world of senses. The world of spirits is outside his or her world of five senses.

Another endowment, or special capacity, of humanity is the faculty of speech. Where did the ability to speak come from? No one has ever spoken who was not first spoken to. Language is purely an imitative thing. How do infants learn to speak? Do they speak as

naturally as they see or smell? The answer is no! Speech is the result of training; it is an imitative faculty of men and women. Without God, the Divine instructor, one could not have communicated to others. God first spoke to Adam and Eve, and this ability has been passed on to mankind through copying, or echoing, speech paterns. Speech, like faith, comes by the ear. Whatever comes by the ear is derived; therefore, human language is acquired. Human language is not natural.

There must be the existence of something before one can assign a name. In other words, the idea of anything must necessarily be prior to the invention of a name for it. Why is this concept important? All nations have had a mental impression of Deity before the word *God*, in their respective languages, could have been invented. For example, the word *steamboat* did not exist prior to steamboats. So it is in the spiritual realm. For example, names such as God, Spirit, altar, priest, and sacrifice are common names to mankind. How were these names derived to men and women? All these conceptions must have existed previously to the invention of names to express them. Speech is as legitimately the subject of Divine Revelation as religion itself, both came from God.

1 Alexander Campbell, *The Evidences of Christianity: A Debate Between Robert Owen, of New Lanark, Scotland and Alexander Campbell, President of Bethany college, VA*—Held in Cincinnati, Ohio, in April 1829—(reprinted—Nashville: McQuiddy Printing Co, 1957), 123.

Baptism in the Great Commission

Part 1 of 3

By Dallas Burdette: February 24, 1998

Thrust Statement: Baptism is from heaven, not men.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 28:18-20

Following the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, He instructed His disciples to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). In this command, Jesus instructed the disciples to do two things: (1) "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (v.19) and (2) "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (v. 20). Mark also records the commission this way: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). Baptism is associated with belief.

Baptism plays a very important role in the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, Matthew begins the ministry of John the Baptist with baptism (**3:1-12**). Immediately following John's call for repentance and baptism, Matthew records the baptism of Jesus (**3:13-17**). Matthew not only begins his Gospel with the baptism of John, but he also concludes his book with Jesus' command to His disciples to baptize. Since Matthew begins and ends his book with baptism, then, it must have played a very important part in the ministry of John and of Jesus.

Can one accept or reject Christian baptism at will? Is baptism essential for salvation? Is baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, Can one refuse baptism and still be saved? Is rejection of baptism a rejection of God's counsel? Is baptism a sign of God's grace? These are questions that I encourage each of you to reflect upon in your decision to follow Christ. During the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, He questioned the chief priest and the elders of the people about John's baptism. Matthew records the following

conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders:

> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. **John's baptism—where did it come from**? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (**Matthew 21:23-25**).

It is obvious that John's baptism came from heaven, not from men. For one to cast-off baptism —God's heavenly design for the believer—is to discard the counsel of God. Luke summarizes this rejection when he writes:

> All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. **But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John** (**Luke 7:29-30**).

When the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected baptism, they rejected God's purpose for themselves. When you renounce Christian baptism, you, too, are declining to consider God's purpose for yourself. One might also ask the question: Is Christ's baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, and it is, then, why not acknowledge that God's way is right and be baptized?

In the Great Commission, as cited above, Jesus commanded His disciple to baptize believers into the name of the trinity (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Just a perusal of the books of the New Testament reveals the role that baptism plays in the conversion of thousands in their response to Jesus as Lord. Luke, in the book of Acts, narrates a significant number of baptisms in the early phases of the Christian church. Were the baptizers acting on the command of Jesus? Could baptism be rejected or accepted just on the whims of the people? Was baptism from heaven or from men? Some citations from the book of Acts should shed some light on the attitude of the first century church as to the importance of this Christian institution.

The Day of Pentecost

For example, on the day of Pentecost, Luke informs us that Peter replied to the penitent, "Repent and **be baptized**, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**). Luke further states: "Those who accepted his message **were baptized**, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**2:41**). Did Peter tell them to do what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission? On that day, Peter "warned them" and he "pleaded with them" to save themselves "from this corrupt generation" (**v.40**). Did any respond? Yes! As stated above, 'Those who accepted his message were baptized." Do you want to save yourself? Then, why not do what they did? They gladly accepted the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus and were baptized the same day (**v.41**)

The People of Samaria

Luke also records the preaching of Philip in Samaria and the response of the people: "But **when they believed** Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they **were baptized**, both men and women" (**8:12**). Luke mentions one of the Samaritans by name—Simon (**v.13**). In fact, he says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (**v.13**).

The Ethiopian Eunuch

In **Acts 9:26-39**, Luke records the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. After the preaching of Philip, the evangelist, the eunuch requested baptism (**v.36**). How did the eunuch know about baptism? Did Philip tell him about this during the course of the conversation? Was baptism essential for his obedience? Was the eunuch baptized? What does the record say? Listen to the following remarks by Philip and the eunuch:

> As they traveled along the road, they **came to some water** and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. **Why shouldn't I be baptized**?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and **Philip baptized him**. When they **came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (**vv.36-39**).

Saul of Tarsus

One of the most notorious persecutors of the Christian church was Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 9**). Following his encounter with the Lord Jesus, he continued his journey to Damascus. Following his three-day blindness (**v. 9**), God sends Ananias (**v. 10**) to restore his sight and to allow Paul to be filled with the Holy Spirit (**v.17**). Immediately following the restoration of his eyesight, Luke says that "He got up and **was baptized**" (**v.19**). Why did Ananias tell him to be baptized? Was it because the Lord had commanded him to be baptized? If he had refused baptism, would he have rejected the counsel of God? Have you yourself rejected the counsel of God by not being baptized as a believer?

Cornelius the Centurion

Luke also records another case of conversion that involved the command of baptism—Cornelius the centurion (**chapter 10**). After the appearance of an angel in a vision, Cornelius was instructed to send for Simon Peter (**v.5**). When Cornelius sends for Peter, Peter responds to the call and leaves the next day for Caesarea (**v.22**). Upon Peter's arrival, he begins to speak:

> "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around

> doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name** (**10:34-43**).

Peter associates "forgiveness of sins" with belief in Jesus (**v. 43**). During Peter's speaking, Luke says, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message (**v.44**). Then, Luke records the astonishment of those who had accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius: "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (**vv. 45-46**). Did they receive "forgiveness of sins" when they believed on the name of the Lord? Did they receive the "Holy Spirit" before baptism? Were they the children of Hell when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them? Did God pour out His Spirit upon children of the Devil? Did this phenomenon exempt them from Christian baptism commanded by our Lord? The answer is no! "Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from **being baptized** with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ" (**vv. 47-48**). Is this not what our Lord told them to do in the Great Commission?

Lydia's Conversion in Philippi

Luke, in his narration of Paul's second missionary journey, tells about the conversion of Lydia and her household (**16:11-15**). Upon their (Paul, Luke, and his companions) arrival in Philippi, a Roman colony (**v. 12**), they inquired about worshipers of the one true God. In their investigation, they discovered that a group of women were outside "the city gate to the river" (**v.13**). Luke writes,

> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. **When she and the members of her household were baptized**, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (**vv.13-15**).

Conversion of the Philippian Jailer

Once when Paul, Luke, and his companions "were going to the place of prayer" (**Acts**

16:16), they were met by a "slave girl who had a spirit" (v.16). As a result of the slave girl following them for several days, "Paul," says Luke, "became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her" (v.18). As a result of this exorcism, the owners of the slave girl seized Paul and Silas and "dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities" (v. 19). This resulted in their imprisonment and the stripping of their clothes followed by a beating (vv.22-23). Ultimately, an angel of God interfered with a "violent earthquake" (v. 26) that shook the very foundations of the prison (v.26). This resulted in the opening of the prison doors and the chains opening up that bound the prisoners (vv.26-27). Luke says,

> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. **He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved**?" They replied, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized**. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (vv.27-34).

How soon before they were baptized? Was it two weeks later? Was it a month later? Did they wait until several responded to the good news of God before baptism? If baptism is so unimportant, as advocated by many Christians, then, why were they baptized "immediately" in the same 'hour of the night"? Does this sound ridiculous? Why the same hour of the night? Does this baptism remind one of the commands of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20?

Baptisms in Corinth

Following their release from prison, Paul and Silas traveled to **Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9)**, then, to Berea (vv.10-15), next, to Athens (vv.16-33), and, finally, Paul arrives in Corinth (18:1). During Paul's stay in Corinth, Luke writes, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (v.4). As a result of his proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, Paul baptized Crispus and many of the Corinthians: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized" (v.8).

Apollos and John's Baptism

Apollos was a learned man and a man "with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). Even though, in the words of Luke, "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" (v.25), he still did not understand the baptism of the Great Commission. As a result of this lack of proper understanding of Christian baptism, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos "to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (v.26). This is

given as an introduction leading up to Paul's engagement with certain ["about twelve men in all"—**19:7**] Christians in Ephesians who knew only the baptism of John (**1-7**). Since they had not been baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus" (**v.5**), they were baptized again: "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (vv.4-5). If baptism is nonessential, then, why were they baptized again? Is it because of the command of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**?—"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**v.19**).

Preached:

Grassy Church of Christ, Arab, Al.
March 1, 1998

Baptized:

Clay Daniel Scofield; **born,** May 6, 1980;
baptized, March 1, 1998

Baptism in the Great Commission

Part 2 of 3

Thrust Statement: **Baptism is the means whereby God allows us to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 6:1-7; Colossians 2:12**

Part one developed the concept that baptism is from heaven, not from men. From this statement, we cited **Matthew 28:18-20** to establish the binding validity of baptism upon all those who respond to God's way of salvation through Jesus, God's Anointed One. Then, we analyzed cases of conversions in the book of Acts to see how they understood the command of baptism in their response to the good news about salvation by grace through faith. This sermon seeks to develop the implications of baptism in the life of the believer.

The ministry of the Christian community is to preach the gospel. This particular ministry is accomplished through "preaching" God's way of redemption and the "ordinances," that is to say, through the Lord's Supper and baptism. When the Word of God is preached, the gospel is being presented. When the Lord's supper is distributed, the gospel is being presented. When baptism is practiced, the gospel is being presented. Why are the ordinances needed? Is not the Word of God sufficient? These are questions that we, as Christians, need to reflect upon in order to appreciate what God has accomplished for us in His divine wisdom.

As a young preacher boy, I used to quote, "I had rather get my sermon by what you do, rather than by what you say." This principle is still applicable today. We are a people who need to be reminded constantly of what God has accomplished for us in His love. If a thing is merely told to me, it is all too easy for it to remain on the abstract and invisible plane. It is altogether different when, at the same time it is being told to me, the gospel is brought to my attention through deeds, that is, through baptism and the Lord's supper. Actions affect and operate in a distinct way. It makes that which is told tangible

and concrete in a manner that the mere word could never do.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the observance of the Lord's Supper, it is God who, in Christ, stoops down to us to remind us of the vicarious sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind and of the final coming of Jesus again for His people. The Lord's Supper provides an opportunity for Christians to reflect upon the story of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus. In the observance of the Lord's supper, it is good for Christians to remember that this message of redemption is not mere word and proclamation, but reality and deed. In fact, Paul says,

> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**).[1]

Just as the Jews, in their observance of the Passover, told the story of redemption from Egypt, so the Christian is to tell the story of redemption from the world of darkness. Paul states emphatically that in this feast of commemoration, Christians "proclaim the death of the Master until He comes" (**v. 26**). We must remember that this message is not mere word and proclamation, but reality and deed.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

In baptism, every Christian encounters the gospel in concrete deed. In baptism one is able to experience the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus His Lord. Paul develops this concept in his letter to the Christians at Colosse. He stresses baptism as a burial and resurrection that the Colossians experienced through "faith in the power of God":

> In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, **having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him** through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead (**Colossians 2:11-12**).

This same view is presented in Paul's letter to the Church at Rome. In **Romans 6**, Paul calls attention to right behavior based upon their new relationship with God through Christ. In developing the standard for ethical behavior, he discusses the implications involved in Christian baptism.

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were **baptized into his death**? We were therefore **buried with him through baptism** into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin (**Romans 6:1-7**).

In baptism God deals with us personally; He takes us from the power of darkness and sets us as believers into the kingdom of His Son. Through natural birth, we belong to a race that is subjected to sin and death, but through spiritual birth, we belong to the new humanity. Jesus, in his conversation with Nicodemus, speaks of the new birth that is required for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He declares,

> I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is **born of water** and the **Spirit**. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (**John 3:5-8**).

As stated above (**Romans 6:1-7**), Paul draws this concept of the new birth in concrete words in his description of Christian baptism. Through baptism, we are placed in an entirely new context. We are now members in the new humanity whose head is Christ and, as a result of this new birth, we now participate in God's righteousness and in the life of the new aeon, that is to say, eternal life. It is, no doubt, for this reason that baptism is called "the birth of regeneration." Listen carefully to the words of Paul to Titus:

> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the **washing of rebirth** and **renewal by the Holy Spirit**, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (**Titus 3:4-7**).

Fifty days after the resurrection, Peter stood before a large multitude and

proclaimed Jesus as God's Anointed One for the redemption of all who would put their trust in Him (**Acts 2**). After proclaiming the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, they were so cut to the heart for having crucified the Messiah that they respond by asking: "Brothers, what shall we do?" (**2:37**). Peter responds by saying: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**2:38**).

Peter combines "water" ("be baptized") and "Spirit." In Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, He combines "water" and "Spirit." Paul also combines "water" and "Spirit" in his letter to Titus. Peter's response to the crowd undoubtedly refers to "water" baptism in **Acts 2:38**. It is very similar in nature to the conversion of Cornelius and his household in which Peter says: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (**Acts 10:47-48**). How did the repentant Jews understand the command in **Acts 2:38**? Luke says, "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**2:41**).

It is natural to assume that the baptism that Peter speaks about is water baptism. Luke, more than any other writer of the New Testament, records numerous conversions. One such conversion had to do with the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. From the narrative of this conversion, Luke mentions water in conjunction with baptism. Luke says that

> The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot**. Then both Philip and the eunuch** went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (**Acts 8:34-39**).

"Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water" and they both "came up out of the water," according to Luke's report. As mentioned above, the conversion of Cornelius and his household involved baptism in water (**Acts 10:46-48**). In reflecting upon John's baptism, we know that his baptism was also a baptism in water (**Matthew 3:1-12**). During one occasion of John's baptism, Matthew reports that Jesus came to be baptized by John. In the narrative, Matthew, informs his readers that "as soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water" (**3:16**). Jesus begins his ministry with water baptism and concludes his ministry with the admonition to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them" (**28:19**). According to Luke's treatise (**Acts**) of the early beginnings of the church to Theophilus, the disciples understood this command of baptism to involve water baptism. Since John the Baptizer baptized Jesus, it is appropriate to cite the apostle John's remarks about John's baptizing near Salim.

> After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also **was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water**, and people were constantly coming to be baptized (**John 3:22-23**).

From the context of these various Scriptures, it appears that it is through baptism that one is born into this new existence that God gave through Christ. Through the natural birth, one is born to a life that bears the mark of death. On the other hand, through baptism, that is to say, the "washing of rebirth" one is born to life—to the life that is "in Christ." Baptism, so it seems, is the act of initiation into the Christian life. Through baptism, one is implanted into a fellowship of life with Christ through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. Paul expresses the role of the Holy Spirit this way: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). Again, one cannot help but reflect upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (**John 3:5**). Jesus commanded water baptism in the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**). If one wishes to see how they understood this command, then, as stated above, all one has to do is read the various accounts of conversions in the book of Acts.

In baptism, the real incorporation "into Christ" takes place, that is to say, "into his death" (**Romans 6:3**) and resurrection (**v. 4**). Yes, baptism not only represents His death but also it represents His resurrection for the believer. Paul expresses it this way: "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection" (**6:5**). The purpose of all this is that we might live a new life. It is in this vein that Paul says: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (**6:4**). Since the believer is in a new context, then, one can say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (**Galatians 2:20-21**).

We are members in Christ's body. Since that which happened to Him who is the head and first born, then, this has also happened to us. In other words, we, too, have experienced death, burial, and resurrection. There appears to be a correspondence between Jesus' baptism and our baptism. Matthew records the baptism of Jesus as He begins His ministry (**Matthew 3:13-17**). For Jesus, baptism was the act of initiation to His messianic work. Baptism showed Him the way He must go, that is, it was the way of suffering, death, and resurrection. Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus predicted His death. Matthew records a conversation that He had with His disciples.

> Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the

> Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father (**Matthew 20:17-23**).

His baptism was a baptism unto death. In conformity with this, Jesus speaks again and again of His suffering and death as a baptism that He had to undergo. For instance, Jesus says, "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (**Luke 12:50**). Again, on another occasion, Jesus asked James and John: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" (**Mark 10:38**). Christ's death upon the cross was that baptism which He underwent once for all, when He as Messiah, the suffering servant, took our place. In the same way, our baptism is the act of initiation through which we are brought into the messianic people. Our baptism embraces our entire Christian life from beginning to end.

May God help each of us to remember that Christian baptism is not only a baptism unto death, but it is also a baptism unto resurrection. Paul calls attention to the new life that Christians now share with Christ. Following his remarks about baptism, he writes:

> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace (**Romans 6:9-14**).

These believers turned their lives around in order to glorify God. Paul says, "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (**Romans 6:17-18**). The Christian "teaching" is not

only the proclamation about God's action in Christ, it is also the pattern or type of life that is in keeping with the teachings of Jesus about holiness. In other words, this "teaching" reflects the life of the Christian as it is to be shaped in Jesus. It is the same thought that Paul speaks of in **Romans 12**:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (**vv. 1-2**).

CONCLUSION

From the time of baptism until death, the baptized person is to live his life "in Christ" (**Colossians 3:1-17**). I ask you once more to reflect upon the baptism of Jesus as well as your own baptism. Jesus, by submitting to baptism, acknowledged God's claim on Him. We, too, acknowledge God's claim on us through baptism. For the believer, baptism calls forth a total consecration of life and holiness of character. Christian baptism is recognizable as being a sign of the coming of God into a person's life. Christian baptism is hope in action. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace. Yes, so it seems, God's grace is appropriated through the medium of the visible sign of baptism. Through baptism in His name, believers are publicly set in Christ's fellowship. Through baptism, we, through God's grace, are allowed to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus our Lord. In baptism, we die to sin and are raised to walk in a new life. In baptism, we are clothed with Christ. Have you clothed yourself with Christ? Are you a child of God? Paul says:

> You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (**Galatians 3:26-29**).

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[1] *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless otherwise stated.

Baptism in the Great Commission

PART 3 OF 3

Trust Statement: Baptism is both symbol and sacrament.

Scripture Reading: Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Acts 22:16[1]

Is baptism a symbol? Is baptism a sacrament? Is it both? Since neither word (symbol or sacrament) is employed in the New Testament writings with baptism, then these words are accommodative nomenclatures to express truths contained in baptism. It appears, so it seems to this author, that baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it also appears that remission of sins is associated in some sense with baptism[2] This author has chosen these two words -- symbol and sacrament -- to try to capture the essence of baptism in the Christian age.

Is baptism something necessary for salvation? Frequently, one interprets baptism within the framework of one's own experience. A good example involves the various explanations attached to the numerous Scriptures dealing with baptism. A common tendency is to read into the text one's own preconceived prejudices. It appears that one such conclusion is that baptism is not correct if one does not understand the precise moment God remits sin(s) in the life of the believer. If baptism is not performed specifically "for the remission of sins," then baptism is invalid, according to many.

Numerous attempts have been made to reconcile baptism with justification by faith. Another crucial question is: What relationship does water baptism have with faith? Again, one must inquire about the "act" of baptism in its relationship to salvation. Does baptism in and of itself have magical power to save an individual apart from faith? Once more, is baptism to be interpreted as a work whereby one earns his or her salvation? Or is baptism a means whereby one responds to salvation offered through faith? Can one dispense with water baptism? Does it have any place in God's economy? These are questions that confront every devout Christian. One seeks to have balance in his or her understanding of this ceremony

commanded by God.

There appears to be a tendency within the Christian community to defame, or discredit, water baptism. One can take it or leave it, so it seems to many! But is this Biblical? Is baptism ordained of God? In other words, Is baptism commanded by God for believers? Are the chief doctrines of Christianity contained in the theology of baptism? What is the significance of baptism in the Christian economy?

Before one embarks upon the question: "Baptism: Symbol or Sacrament?", a word of caution is needed concerning our phraseology about baptism being God's plan of salvation. Christians talk of God's plan of salvation; but what do believers mean by this phrase? The "plan of salvation" is identified with: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized. But is this God's plan of salvation? Or are these the means whereby one responds to God's "plan of salvation," which is Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am the way." God sent Jesus in order to redeem man from His wrath. Salvation is IN and THROUGH Jesus Christ.

BAPTISM AS SYMBOL

When one confronts Pauline teaching on baptism, one is confronted with a whole range of ideas of a most complex subject. For example, Paul informs the Colossians that in Christ everyone is a "new self" (**3:10**); in other words, in Christ there is neither "Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (**3:11**). All this is expressed as having "put on the new self" (**3:10**). How does one become united with Christ wherein the divisions of our race are obliterated? This, according to Paul, occurs when one is "Buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (**2:12**). Within the *ekklesia* (church) of God, the divisions of our race are wiped out, the work of Christ for all men become visible and effective, for to be "in Christ" is to be in the church. Into all of this a man steps as he puts his faith in Christ and is baptized: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (**Gal. 3:26-27**). These ideas and presuppositions are expressed graphically in **Colossians 3:10ff**.

Jesus has become the Initiator of a new race of men who know the power of redemption. For Paul the doctrine of salvation is as Christ-centered as his doctrine of the *ekklesia*, and both come to spotlight in water baptism. In other words, baptism directs the gaze of the man or woman being baptized, as well as those who observe his/her baptism, to Him who died and rose for all men: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." **(Romans 6:3-5**).

Baptism was ordained by the Lord for all Christians, just as the Christian experience of life in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit was intended for all believers: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**). This command on the part of Peter was in response to the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit" (**28:19**).

Many today deny the importance of baptism as a means for the transmission of grace, that is, forgiveness of sins, reception of the Holy Spirit, induction into the body of Christ, etc.; thus, many insist on ONLY viewing baptism as a beautiful and expressive symbol of certain basic facts in the redemptive mission of our Lord, but, at the same time, deny any efficacy or grace imparted to the respondent. Therefore, a key term employed by many believers is simply "representation." In other words, to many, baptism is nothing more than a picture, a witness, a sign of the salvation established by the Lord. Yes, it is this, but more.

SACRAMENT

Another side of the coin is baptism as a sacrament. Yet this aspect of baptism may also be corrupted. It is wrong to look upon baptism as a "miracle working rite" (sacramentalism). Baptism is not a human manipulation, a secret procedure through which a man or woman may appropriate something hard to obtain. It is not a heathen rite in which one engages in order to control his gods. No, in Christian baptism, the blessings of salvation mediated through it are bestowed by God. It is in response to God as Creator for His great love where with He loved us that one is submissive to the ordinance of baptism. In other words, baptism should never be viewed as a "magical rite"; that is, baptismal regeneration. It is both symbol and sacrament.

When one approaches the symbolic nature of baptism and its sacramental nature, one has the tendency to go to extremes. For example, when the symbolic nature of baptism is stressed, the tendency is to look upon baptism as a useless addition that supplies nothing important. In other words, it is superfluous, no real value. Though many abuse baptism as commanded by Jesus, one must never forget the symbolic element in baptism. For in the symbolic element of baptism, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is easily grasped and should be safeguarded rather than minimized. Immersion is much clearer in this symbolic act than the act of pouring or sprinkling.

One of the most obvious elements in baptismal symbolism is the cleansing of sin: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (**Acts 22:16**). Second, the sinking of the baptized beneath water and rising again is an appropriate symbolism of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (**Rom. 6:3-5**). This act of baptism represents it vividly!

One cannot deny that the Holy Spirit associates gifts, effects, blessing, and associations with baptism. Consider the following: (1) forgiveness of sins associated with baptism on Pentecost [**Acts 2:38**]; (2) Ananias expresses the same thing in terms to Paul about baptism [**22:1**6]; (3) baptism and union of Christ are combined in Galatians ["for" indicates how these men of faith came to be in Christ {**3:26**}] [**3:26ff**]; (3) in baptism, one is buried and raised with Christ [**Col. 2:12**]; (4) in baptism, union with Christ and release from the power and guilt of sin and the sharing in the risen life of the redeemer are drawn out [**Rom. 6:1-11**]; (5) in baptism, the possession of the Holy Spirit is granted [**Acts 2:38**]; (6) baptism and washing of the new beginning are combined by Paul [**Titus 3:5**].

This last quote (**Titus 3:5**) deserves special attention: "Not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal

by the Holy Spirit." Salvation is characterized by the "rebirth" (new beginning) and "renewal" which the Holy Spirit effects. In other words, water cannot give the "new beginning" with God; only the Holy Spirit can produce that, but the context of his operation is here stated to be baptism (see also **John 3:5** and **I Cor. 12:13**).

Membership within the Christian community (church) is associated with baptism: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (**I Cor. 12:13**). This Scripture is of significance in that it implies that to be baptized in water is to be baptized in the Spirit. Inheritance of the Kingdom of God is identified with baptism: "Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit'" (**Jn.3:5**). By the time that John wrote this account of Jesus and his activities, it had become axiomatic in the *ekklesia* that baptism in water and the gift of the Spirit were combined in a single experience (**Acts 2:38**). In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he associates baptism, sanctification (consecration), and justification: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (**I Cor 6:11**), presumably in consequence of their baptism.

We conclude this list by recalling the importance of the baptismal text in **First Peter 3:21**: "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It should be observed that the operative factor in all of this is the "resurrection of Jesus Christ," not water. The water of baptism saves nobody. The baptism that saves is one in which the baptized declares his response to God's approach to him through the Gospel of Christ: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (**Rm. 1:17**).

Baptism is a spiritual act, and this is why Peter is so anxious to correct any possible misapprehension of it. Peter would have concurred with Paul: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Eph. 2:8-9**).

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above study, I am compelled to conclude that the understanding of baptism as "a beautiful and expressive symbol," and nothing more, is irreconcilable with the New Testament. Also for one to understand baptism only as a sacrament, that is, as a magic formula for the forgiveness of sins apart from the atonement is also wrong. Baptism embodies the saving acts of God in Christ and the response of the person submitting in baptism to that Gospel. The proclamation of the Good News and the hearing of faith are united in a single action, namely, baptism.

ENDNOTES

[1] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

[2] This is why baptism is spoken of as a sacrament. Even though the word sacrament is employed in this essay, it is not to be interpreted as a sacrament in the normal sense of the term as utilized by the Catholic Church.

Baptism: Participation in the Death and Resurrection of Christ

Thrust Statement: **Baptism is the means whereby an individual participates in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 6:3-10; Colossians 2:12**

The subject of baptism has divided Christendom into various warring factions. Is baptism immersion or is it sprinkling or is it pouring? Are there three modes of baptism in the New Testament? Are all three methods valid as far as biblical baptism is concerned? As one approaches the mode of baptism, one observes that most bodies (churches) of believers practice pouring or sprinkling instead of immersion, which practice (sprinkling/pouring) is not found in the New Testament writings. Just a perusal of baptism in the New Testament reveals that the symbolism of baptism is best portrayed by immersion. Since baptism is closely associated with the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ, immersion is the most accurate symbol of the Gospel of God. In baptism, one immediately recognizes that baptism is a sensible sign of putting off the old person and putting on the new person. When one receives biblical baptism, one signifies that he or she abandons the old life and enters into a new one. It is in this vein that Paul writes: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, [27] for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (**Galatians 3:26-27**).[1]

Within Christendom, the so-called baptizing (sprinkling or pouring of water) of infants is common practice among many sincere believers. Yet, in the New Testament writings, baptism only applied to grown men and women who heard the Good News of salvation by grace through faith. Another issue that confronts the church today is the essentiality of baptism in the life of men and women. What is the purpose of baptism in the scheme of redemption? The debate still rages over the essentiality of baptism and its mode. The question is often proposed: can one be saved without water baptism? Also, some Christians demand that one understands "forgiveness of sins" as prerequisite for Scriptural baptism; otherwise, baptism is null and void. Many Christians, within various fellowships, will not accept someone's baptism unless it is performed by one of their own

party, and some will not acknowledge one's baptism as valid unless he or she understood "for the forgiveness of sins" before immersion.[2]

As one seeks answers to the enigma, or mystery, of baptism, one should begin his or her investigation with John the Baptist's baptism as well as the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Matthew begins his Gospel with an introduction to the ministry of John, which ministry began with a call to repentance and baptism (**Matthew 3:1-12**). Mark sets in motion his Gospel with opening remarks about the "beginning of the gospel about Jesus" and then proceeds to describe the ministry of John with his emphasis on "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin Jamartiwn] (**Mark 1:1-4**). Luke also commences his Gospel with a reference to the ministry of John the Baptist: "He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin Jamartiwn] (**Luke 3:3**). Both Mark and Luke add the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins." After the death of Christ, one observes Peter on the Day of Pentecost—the birthday of the church, or new community of God—also proclaiming baptism in the name of Jesus for the "forgiveness of sins" [εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, eis afesin twn Jamartiwn] (**Acts 2:38**).[3]

What does baptism for the "forgiveness of sins" mean or convey? Perhaps, the mystery can be more readily understood if one begins with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Since John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, one wonders why Christ submitted to water baptism. This knowledge of Jesus' sinlessness caused John, too, to questioned Jesus about His request for baptism (**Matthew 3:13-14**). Jesus' response to John is one of the most controversial of His remarks. Jesus said to John: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness" (**3:15**). Unfortunately, Matthew did not give an explanation of what it means, "to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus' baptism, so it seems, points toward the end, that is to say, the Cross, by which means He was able "to fulfill all righteousness." In order to accomplish salvation for men and women, He united Himself in solidarity with the human race. The most logical explanation of Jesus' comments about His baptism centers on Himself as the Suffering Servant of God. In other words, Jesus is baptized in view of His death as atonement for the sins of the world, which sacrifice brings about forgiveness of sins for those who believe. After the sacrifice of Christ, Christians, too, are baptized with a view toward forgiveness of sins in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. Christ's baptism looked toward the future; on the other hand, Christian baptism looks back to the Cross.

Thus, Jesus' answer to John the Baptist—πληρῶσαι πᾶσαν δικαιοσύνην, plhrwsai pasan dikaiosunhn, "to fulfill all righteousness—acquires a precise meaning. Jesus goes to the Jordan so that "all righteousness might be fulfilled." Jesus' baptism is related not only to His δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosunh, "righteousness") but also to humanity. In His baptism, He identifies Himself with His people. Paul expresses this truth this way: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (**2 Corinthians 5:21a**). Why was this necessary? Paul explains: "So that in him we might become the righteousness of God" [ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ, Jhmeis genwmeqa dikaiosunh qeou en autw] (**5:21b**). Later, Paul wrote to the Romans about the necessity of the atonement, which death upon the Cross enabled God to demonstrate His righteousness in the Crucifixion of Jesus. Paul writes with insight as he seeks to uncover the mystery of the

Gospel hidden from the foundation of the world:

> But now righteousness from God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, dikaiosunh qeou), apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, dikaiosunh qeou) comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (**Romans 3:21-26**)

As one approaches the baptism of Jesus, one is conscious that His baptism pointed toward the end of His ministry upon Calvary in which all baptisms find their fulfillment. For Jesus to submit to baptism, this act, in and of itself, portrays His suffering and death in order to bring about righteousness for lost humanity. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, sets forth God's wisdom of sending Jesus to "fulfill all righteousness" by becoming "righteousness" for the believer. Pay attention to Paul as he discloses God's wisdom in the sending of Jesus: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**).

For one to advance the notion that His baptism meant to suffer is not pure speculation. Both Mark and Luke give the comments of Jesus concerning His ultimate baptism—death on the Cross for the sins of the world. Mark informs his readers that Jesus on His way to Jerusalem predicted His death (**Mark 10:32-34**). Following this revelation, both James and John sought places of honor in the kingdom. Jesus informed both brothers that they did not really know what they were requesting. At this point, Jesus asked: "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (**10:38**)? They answered, "We can" (**10:39**). Then Jesus said to the brothers: "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" (**10:39**). Luke, too, narrates another incident in which Jesus speaks of His death as a baptism: "I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed" (**Luke 12:50**). In both cases, Jesus speaks of His death—a death represented by baptism. Jesus will complete the general baptism for all humanity in His atonement. Jesus is baptized in view of His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

Following the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, He instructed His disciples to make disciples of all nations (**Matthew 28:19**). In this command, Jesus instructed the disciples to do two things: (1) "baptizing them in the name (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, eis to onoma, "into the name") of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**28:19**) and (2) "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (**28:20**). Mark also records the commission this way: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:15-16**). Baptism is associated with belief. For baptism to be

effective, one must believe and repent. Jesus' baptism pointed to the future, and, after the Cross, the believer's baptism points to the past—the Cross of Jesus. Baptism for the believer is a baptism into the Death of Christ. It is in Christian baptism that one participates in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ. John, too, gives a brief description of some of the events that transpired at the time of Jesus' baptism and, at the same time, his commentary upon the events. Listen to John the Baptist as he reflects upon this event, which scenario is recorded by John (one of the Apostles):

> The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! [30] This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' [31] I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." [32] Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. [33] I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' [34] I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." (**John 1:29-34**)

In order to set the stage for a clearer understanding of baptism as it is presented in this discussion, a few comments about the very heart and kernel of baptism is appropriate. Jesus' baptism in water prefigured His ultimate baptism in death in order to bring in "righteousness" for the one who believes. After the Cross of Calvary, baptism is now, for the believer, a baptism into the death of Christ. Christian baptism is founded upon the life of Christ and goes back to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Even though one may not understand the full implications of baptism and its relationship to salvation, the following comments should enhance one's appreciation for baptism in God's scheme of redemption. For example, in baptism, one experiences the end of the old aeon and the beginning of the new aeon. In Christ, one becomes a new creation. It is through baptism that Christ's death becomes the death of every believer. In other words, the Christ event—death, burial, and resurrection—is present in the baptismal event. Another insight about baptism is that in baptism, one is transferred to Christ and is, at the same time, submerged in His death. For one to be buried with Him in baptism is a seal of the believer's dying with Him.

One can say without reservation, Christ's death is my grave. In baptism, God, through the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, opens for every believer a new life. Again, to be buried with Him is a seal of the believer's dying with Him. In baptism, Christ takes the penitent sinner into His own Death and Life. When believers share in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection, they die to sin and come alive to righteousness. The baptized person is one who believes that he or she has eternal life through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. The new life for every Christian can only occur in the deed of Christ Himself—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. It is "in" and "through" baptism that one experiences participation in Him. Also, one can say that in baptism, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ. Christians ought also to look to the rite of baptism as their dedication of the new life in and through Jesus.

As one examines the many cases of baptism in the New Testament, one can

appreciate why every believer submitted to baptism. Baptism plays a very important role in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew begins his Gospel with John's baptism of repentance and the baptism of Jesus, and then he concludes his Gospel with the final words of Jesus to His disciples about baptism. For example, Matthew, after his introduction, begins the ministry of John the Baptist with his emphasis on baptism (**Matthew 3:1-12**). Immediately following John's call for repentance and baptism, Matthew records the baptism of Jesus (**3:13-17**). It is significant, as just stated, that Matthew not only begins his Gospel with the baptism of John, but he also concludes his book with Jesus' command to His disciples to baptize. Since Matthew begins and ends his book with baptism, then, it must have played a very important part in the ministry of John and of Jesus.

After the death of Jesus, one observes a new status in baptism. In other words, baptism is the entry of individuals into the new community of Christ. Christian baptism had, from the beginning, the concept of one's induction into the Body of Christ—the new Israel of God. In baptism, one becomes so united with Christ in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection that one dies to sin and rises with Him to a new life. One can say that baptism marks the entry of each individual into the community of the Assembly of God's anointed One on earth. This brings one to the question: can one accept or reject Christian baptism at will? Is baptism essential for one's response to God's salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus? As one seeks to understand Christian baptism, one must ask another question: is baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, can one obstinately refuse baptism and still be saved? Is rejection of baptism a dismissal of God's counsel? Is baptism a sign of God's grace and forgiveness? These are questions that every one ought to reflect upon in one's decision to follow Christ. During the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, He questioned the chief priest and the elders of the people about John's baptism. The Holy Spirit, through Matthew, records the following conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders:

> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" (**Matthew 21:23-25**).

It is obvious that John's baptism came from heaven, not from men. For one to reject Christian baptism—God's heavenly design for the believer—is to thrust aside the counsel of God. Baptism is one means of responding to God's grace. Baptism should quicken the faith of every individual who identifies himself or herself with Christ's Death, Burial, and Resurrection. Can one reject, or decline, the baptism commanded by Christ and receive salvation? Is it wrong to discard, or abandon, God's counsel? Luke summarizes this rejection of John's baptism by the religious leaders when he writes with pungency, or sharpness:

> All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for

themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (**Luke 7:29-30**).

When the Pharisees and the experts in the law discarded baptism, they cast off God's purpose for themselves. When one renounces Christian baptism, one too, declines to consider God's purpose for himself or herself. One might also ask the question: is Christ's baptism from heaven or from men? If it is from heaven, and it is, then, why not acknowledge that God's way is right and be baptized? When one is baptized in the name of Jesus, one acknowledges God's way of salvation in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Tree is right. In the Great Commission, as cited above, Jesus commanded His disciple to baptize believers into the name of the trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Just a perusal of the books of the New Testament reveals the role that baptism plays in the conversion of thousands in their response to Jesus as Lord. Luke, in the Book of Acts, narrates a significant number of baptisms in the early phases of the Christian church. Were the baptizers acting on the command of Jesus? Could baptism be rejected or accepted just on the whims of the people? Was baptism from heaven or from men?

BAPTISM: A SEAL OF ONE'S REDEMPTION

There are clues, here and there, that one gleans from Scripture in seeking to understand the various ramifications in Christian baptism. A study on baptism would be incomplete without a brief analysis of circumcision in relationship to Abraham's justification in **Romans 4**. Was Abraham justified by faith or did circumcision justify him? Did circumcision play a role in his justification? Was he justified by faith before circumcision? Was circumcision a seal of that which had already taken place—justification?[4] As one reflects upon Abraham and his circumcision, one is quickly aware that Abraham was only seventy-five years old when God justified him through faith (**Genesis 12:4**). Twenty-four years after God entered into a covenant with Abraham, He gave him circumcision as a sign of that covenant (**17:10**). Circumcision, according to Paul, was a seal of that which had already taken place [justification by faith] (**Romans 4:11**). Christian baptism is the counterpart of Jewish circumcision that God gave to Abraham four hundred and thirty years prior to the Law of Moses.

Just as Abraham's circumcision was a sign or seal of God's covenant with Abraham, so Christian baptism is a spiritual circumcision, which circumcision represents God's seal of the New Covenant—God's forgiveness of sins. According to Paul, baptism symbolizes the Gospel of the Resurrection (**Romans 6:3-4**). In baptism, one observes from Scripture that baptism is not just simply "bare symbolism," not just something expressive of faith, but rather, in baptism, something is actually accomplished. In other words, when one receives Christian baptism, he or she passes into the Spirit-controlled community and shares in the new life (**6:4**). Olive Wyon's comments about symbols are pertinent and informative. She writes with insight as she seeks to capture the very essence of symbols in the scheme of redemption: "Real symbols are not 'mere convention'. They are full of meaning; they point towards a transcendent reality. The symbol is not *invented*; it is born, not made. It does not merely *signify* reality; it *embodies* reality."[5]

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The primary thrust of this essay is to detail examples of baptism in the Christian

community following the Day of Pentecost. The Day of Pentecost illustrates the necessity of symbols acted out in one's response to Jesus as Lord. The new humanity of God needs symbols to compass the inexpressible things of one's experience. Perhaps there is a sense in which one confesses that the highest cannot be spoken with exactness, but rather it must be acted out to capture the very kernel of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. In baptism, one becomes conscious that the Gospel of God is a Gospel of Divine action in time. In the symbol conveyed in baptism, the message of salvation comes to its focus and is made plain. Men and women did not choose the symbol of immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins, but rather, God did the choosing.

In baptism, one can look back at that moment of his death with Christ and say, "He forgave me all my sins." Baptism, even as the Lord's Supper, is the visible word, that is, a moving actuality that represents God's grace. In baptism, one is reminded of God's action in reaching out to men and women through grace. Baptism proclaims what God has accomplished for humanity. Christ redeemed lost humanity, and baptism is the divinely given sign of this fact. When one is buried with Jesus in baptism, one experiences the foundation of his or her certainty of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The late editor of Ensign, R. L. Kilpatrick (1927-2004), once told this writer, "When confronted with doubts about my salvation, I remind myself that I have been baptized, which is the foundation of my certainty."

Some citations from the Book of Acts should shed some light on the attitude of the first century church as to the importance of this Christian institution. For example, on the Day of Pentecost, Luke informs Theophilus that Peter, in response to an inquiry from his audience, replied to the penitents, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**). Luke further states: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**2:41**). Did Peter tell them to do what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission?

On that day, Peter "warned them" and he "pleaded with them" to save themselves "from this corrupt generation" (**2:40**). Did any respond? Yes! As stated above, 'Those who accepted his message were baptized" (**2:41**). Do you want to save yourself? Then, why not do what they did? They gladly accepted the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus and were baptized the same day, which baptism announced to those present that they had accepted God's way of salvation in and through Jesus (**2:41**). Their acceptance of baptism symbolized, as stated above, the Gospel of the Resurrection. Just a brief reflection upon the act of baptism reveals that this act is an outward embodiment of what the Gospel of God really means. Baptism is a gift from God; it is a sign of God's grace.

In baptism, the Pentecostal converts accepted God's purpose for themselves. Through repentance and baptism, they acknowledged that God's way was right and identified themselves as a part of God's elect. **Acts 2:38** reveals that there are two commands and two promises. The two commands are: repent and be baptized. The two promises are: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Forgiveness of sins" is not a part of the command; forgiveness of sins is an executive act of pardon that takes place in the mind of God, not what one does for God. If one repents and is baptized, he or

she receives forgiveness of sins and receives the Holy Spirit as an earnest (ἀρραβών, arrabwn) of one's guarantee of eternal life (**Ephesians 1:13-14**). One's baptism is one means of knowing that one has accepted God's message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Tree. Have you accepted this message of salvation by submitting to Christian baptism? If not, why not? Remember, baptism is a dying and rising with Christ. Peter sets forth the concept that baptism is also the acknowledged way into the new community (**Acts 2:47**).

THE PEOPLE OF SAMARIA

Luke also records the preaching of Philip in Samaria and the response of the people: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (**8:12**). Luke mentions one of the Samaritans by name—Simon (**8:13**). In fact, he says, "Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (**8:13**). Their submission to baptism demonstrated their acceptance of Philip's message about Jesus. It is in this vein that Luke writes about the reaction of the Apostles in Jerusalem: "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them" (**8:14**). Again, baptism signified their acceptance of Philip's message of the Good News about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus.

Today, how do individuals know if one has accepted, or received, the message of salvation? Is it not through repentance and one's baptism? Do you, too, believe the message proclaimed by Philip? One cannot read the eighth chapter of Acts without a realization that baptism is the proper response to the Good News of God's kingdom. One way for one to display, or reveal, to the church and to the world that one acknowledges the message of salvation in and through Jesus is by submitting, or yielding, to baptism. In baptism, one identifies himself or herself with Him. In baptism, one witnesses, as it were, the Death, Burial, and Resurrection in miniature. The human act of baptism becomes the effective symbol of the Divine act of redemption. Immersion in water brings together, as it were, the effective symbolism of the historical event on Calvary—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

Following Luke's attention about the work of Philip in Samaria, he then turns his attention to another conversion—the Ethiopian eunuch, which conversion came about through Philip sharing with him the atonement of Jesus as presented in **Isaiah 53**. This story is found in **Acts 8:26-39.** In this scenario, one is allowed to peer, as it were, into the conversion of this Ethiopian eunuch. After Philip's explanation of **Isaiah 53**, the eunuch requested baptism (**v.36**). How did the eunuch know about baptism? Did Philip tell him about baptism during the course of his conversation? Was baptism essential for his obedience? Was the eunuch baptized? What does the record say? Listen to the following dialogue between Philip and the eunuch:

> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water (εἰς

> τὸ ὕδωρ, eis to Judwr) and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water (ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος, ek tou Judatos), the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (**8:36-39**).

In some vivid way, the baptism of the eunuch symbolized the Gospel message. In other words, baptism was the embodiment of the κήρυγμα (khrugma, "message" or "proclamation"). Just a perusal of this pericope (Philip and the Ethiopian), as observed above, one witnesses the Ethiopian reading from **Isaiah 53** (**8:30-33**). At this point, one hears Philip beginning with this prophecy concerning the coming Messiah and explains to him "the good news about Jesus" (**8:35**). Once again, how does one know that the eunuch accepted this Good News about redemption through the finished work of Christ? One knows that he acknowledged this message of salvation by grace in and through Jesus by his baptism (immersion). Sprinkling or pouring (common methods of so-called baptism among many Christians) do not fit the scenario concerning the biblical act of baptism, which baptism is immersion, as is set forth in the Scriptures. Pay attention once more to the biblical account of the eunuch's baptism. Luke reports that as both men rode together in the chariot, the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized" (**8:37**). Upon Philip's hearing this request, Luke writes (pardon the repetition):

> And he (Philip) gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. (**8:38-39**)

It is significant that Luke gives the details about the eunuch's baptism. For example, "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water." Again, he says, "they came up out of the water," which statements convey the idea that baptism is not pouring or sprinkling water on the head of the person desiring baptism. Baptism is immersion. The major words used in the New Testament to describe this experience are the Greek words βάπτισμα (baptisma, "baptism") and the verb βαπτίζω (baptizw, "to dip, immerse, submerge, baptize"). Baptizw is actually an intensive form of the verb βάπτω (baptw, "to dip, immerse"). Baptism involves a burial; on the other hand, sprinkling does not involve a burial. Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians, writes: "Having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (**Colossians 2:12**). Once more, Paul to the Romans refers to baptism this way: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death" (**Romans 6:4**). The Greek word suggests immersion or submerging under water.

When the eunuch requested baptism, he identified with the Good News of God. Also, one can say that in his baptism he committed his life to Jesus. One's baptism also portrays one's hope for resurrection and eternal life. As one reflects upon Christian baptism, one is conscious that baptism symbolizes the first step toward living one's life for God. When one is baptized, one participates in the Body of Christ, that is, in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. In the New Testament, baptism is associated with repentance as well as the washing away of sins, or forgiveness of sins (**Acts 22:16; 2:38; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). W. F. Flemington's comments about **1 Corinthians 6:9, 11** are informative about the relationship of forgiveness associated with baptism and the moral life of holiness following baptism:

> He (Paul) goes on to give examples of the flagrant immoralities for which Corinth was notorious even in pagan eyes. Once some of them practiced these things. But now that is all over and done with! Something happened to them when they became Christians. They were washed in the water of baptism: that meant cleansing from sin, consecration to God's service, being "put right" in God's sight. In other words, A Christian who lives an immoral life is utterly belying the meaning of his own baptism.[6]

SAUL OF TARSUS

One of the most notorious persecutors of the Christian church was Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 9**). Following his encounter with the Lord Jesus, he continued his journey to Damascus. Following his three-day blindness (**9: 9**), God sends Ananias (**9:10**) to restore his sight and to allow Paul to be filled with the Holy Spirit (**9:17**). Immediately following the restoration of his eyesight, Luke says, "He got up and was baptized" (**9:19**). Why did Ananias tell him to be baptized? Was it because the Lord had commanded him to be baptized? If he had refused baptism, would he have rejected the counsel of God? Have you yourself rejected the counsel of God by not being baptized as a believer? In spite of the negative overtones by some Christians concerning forgiveness of sins associated with baptism, nevertheless, baptism is associated with repentance and remission of sins.

In fact, Ananias told Paul: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash (ἀπόλουσαι, apolousai, "washaway") your sins away, calling on his name" (**22:16**). Since baptism is closely associated with the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ, the act itself calls to mind the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ. Baptism is itself a powerful symbol of God's means of forgiveness. One cannot read the New Testament writings without a consciousness of the connection between baptism and Jesus' Death and Resurrection, which baptism symbolizes one dying to sin and rising to a new life in Christ. In addition to this symbolism of death, burial, and resurrection, one also observes the motif, or theme, of cleansing, which includes both forgiveness of past sins and liberation from the power of sin. Another motif associated with baptism is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the early church marked a new beginning, or new status, for every believer—entry of the individual into the new community of God's chosen people.

If one wishes to understand more fully the position of Paul and his baptism, one should read the Book of Galatians in which Paul develops the theme of justification by faith. Justification is based on faith, not works of law. Listen to Paul as he discusses the subject of justification:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (**Galatians 2:15-16**)

Paul did not discount baptism as relevant in the scheme of God's redemption for humanity. In the third Chapter of Galatians, he illustrates justification by faith. In order to nail the coffin shut, so to speak, he calls forth Abraham to prove that justification is

through faith, not works. Again, he writes: "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith" (**3:11**). After his discussion of Abraham's seed (Christ), he explains:

> But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. [23] Before this faith (τὴν πίστιν, thn pistin, "the faith") came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith (τὴν πίστιν, thn pistin, "the faith") should be revealed. [24] So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ[b] that we might be justified by faith. [25] Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. (**3:22-25**)

The Authorized Version (KJV) renders the translation as "But before faith came" (**3:23**), which translation is somewhat misleading. Faith existed in the Old Testament, but "the faith" is faith in Jesus as the Messiah. How does one become a child of God? Paul's response is quite revealing: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, dia ths pistews en Cristw Ihsou, "through the faith in Christ Jesus)" (**3:26**). Even though one becomes a child of God through faith, baptism is still the point of clothing oneself with Christ: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (**3:27**). Just as circumcision made one an Israelite, so baptism makes one a Christ's man or woman. It is at the point of baptism that one becomes united with Christ. It is at the place of baptism that the believer professes his or her faith in Christ. In baptism, God, on His part, accepts one's faith and gives to him or her His Holy Spirit as an earnest, or guarantee, of salvation. When one is baptized "into Christ," one takes on the character of Christ. Christians are dead to sin, but, at the same time, they are alive to God. The body one bears is no longer a body of sin. One who is baptized is one who believes and hopes in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. For the one who is baptized, there is a constant direction toward God in his or her daily walk with God. When one is baptized, there is included in this death, burial, and resurrection a new being, that is to say, a new life.

CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

Luke also records another case of conversion that involved the command of baptism—Cornelius the centurion (**chapter 10**). After the appearance of an angel in a vision, Cornelius was instructed to send for Simon Peter (**10:5**). When Cornelius sends for Peter, Peter responds to the call and leaves the next day for Caesarea (**10:22**). Upon Peter's arrival, he begins to speak:

> I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God

> raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him (πιστεύοντα εἰς αὐτόν, pisteuontas eis auton, "believing into Him") receives forgiveness of sins through his name (**10:34-43**).

Peter associates "forgiveness of sins" with belief in Jesus (**10:43**). During Peter's speaking, Luke says, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message [τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον, tous akouontas ton logon, "the ones hearing the discourse"] (**10:44**). Then, Luke records the astonishment of those who had accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius: "The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (**10: 45-46**). Did they receive "forgiveness of sins" when they believed on the name of the Lord? Did they receive the "Holy Spirit" before baptism or after baptism? Were Cornelius and his household the children of Hell when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them? Did God pour out His Spirit upon children of the Devil? Did this phenomenon of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit exempt them from Christian baptism commanded by our Lord? The answer is no! Baptism, undoubtedly, is the act of initiation into the New Israel of God. In other words, baptism meant entering into the redeemed community of God's *ekklesia*, or church. In baptism one is brought into a new and supernatural environment—the new Israel of God. Baptism is a constant reminder of God's grace—forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus upon Calvary.

There are no easy answers to all the questions set forth by godly men and women as they seek to understand baptism. Just a perusal of this unique case of conversion, one is left with many questions concerning the point of baptism. For example, where they accepted by God before baptism? The answer is no doubt in the affirmative. Yet, even though God accepted them before baptism, this favorable reception did not relinquish them from their obedience in baptism, which Jesus commanded. Again, one might inquire, were their hearts purified by faith or by baptism? Sometime later, Peter, at the Jerusalem Council, addressed this issue of Cornelius' conversion with the following analysis, which analysis does not mention baptism:

> After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. [8] God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. [9] He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. (**Acts 15:7-9**)

Since they had been accepted by God and their hearts "purified by faith," then "Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name

of Jesus Christ" (**10:47-48**). Is this not what our Lord told the Apostles to do in the Great Commission? Oscar Cullmann (born 1902), Lutheran theologian, is right on target when he writes:

> The event of Golgotha stands from the point of view of time and salvation in the same relation to the event of Baptism as to the event of the Eucharist. This means on the one side that baptism is no kind of repetition of that historical once-for-all event, but an ever new event, which, whatever a member is 'added,' reminds us that salvation history continues in the present time, On the other hand, it means, of course, that this present event is entirely determined by the once-for-all event at Golgotha, the ἐφάπαξ (efapac) of the centre of time.[7]

Sometime later, Peter addressed a group of believers (Apostles and elders) in Jerusalem (**Acts 15**) concerning God's method of justification. After some discussion, Peter discussed the reception of the Gentiles into the family of God. Luke records the following editorial comments along with the words of Peter concerning Cornelius's conversion and justification before God (pardon the repetition):

> The apostles and elders met to consider this question. [7] After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. [8] God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. [9] He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. [10] Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? [11] No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." (**Acts 15:6-11**)

Even though they were baptized (**Acts 10**), nevertheless, Peter does not dwell upon water baptism as the point of acceptance with God. God who knew the heart of Cornelius and his household demonstrated His acceptance of them by pouring out on them the Holy Spirit. Also, Peter focuses upon faith as the means of God cleansing their hearts, not baptism. He says that God "purified their hearts by faith" (τῇ πίστει καθαρίσας τὰς καρδίας αὐτῶν, th pistei kaqarisas tas kardias autwn, "by cleansing the hearts of them"). One can say that in baptism one is subjugated, or under God's control, to His righteousness and His sanctification. In baptism, participation into His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection is gained. Through this act, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ.

LYDIA'S CONVERSION IN PHILIPPI

Luke, in his narration of Paul's second missionary journey, tells about the conversion of Lydia and her household (**16:11-15**). Upon their (Paul, Luke, and his companions) arrival in Philippi, a Roman colony (**16:12**), they inquired about worshipers of the one true God. In their investigation, they discovered that a group of women were outside "the city gate to the river" (**16:13**). In this narration of Lydia's conversion, one is conscious that she publicly responded to Paul's message of salvation by submitting to

Christian baptism. Baptism is one means of one's knowing that an individual has accepted the message of salvation based upon the finished work of Christ upon Calvary and, at the same time, signifies one's commitment to Jesus. Luke writes,

> On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us (**vv.13-15**).

CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

Once when Paul, Luke, and his companions "were going to the place of prayer" (**Acts 16:16**), they were met by a "slave girl who had a spirit" (**16:16**). As a result of the slave girl following them for several days, "Paul," says Luke, "became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the spirit left her" (**16:18**). As a result of this exorcism, the owners of the slave girl seized Paul and Silas and "dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities" (**16: 19**). This resulted in their imprisonment and the stripping of their clothes followed by a beating (**16:22-23**). Ultimately, an angel of God interfered with a "violent earthquake" (**16:26**) that shook the very foundations of the prison (**16:26**). This resulted in the opening of the prison doors and the chains came loose that bound the prisoners (**16:26-27**). Luke says,

> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family (**vv.27-34**).

How did the Philippian jailor demonstrate that he, too, accepted this message of salvation? How soon before they were baptized? Was it two weeks later? Was it a month later? Did they wait until several responded to the Good News of God before baptism? If baptism is so unimportant, as advocated by many Christians, then, why were they baptized "immediately" in the same 'hour of the night"? Does this sound ridiculous? Why the same hour of the night? Does this baptism remind one of the commands of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**?

BAPTISMS IN CORINTH

Following their release from prison, Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica (**Acts 17:1-9**), then, to Berea (**17:10-15**), next, to Athens (**17:16-33**), and, finally, Paul arrives in Corinth (**18:1**). During Paul's stay in Corinth, Luke writes, "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (**18:4**). As a result of his proclaiming the Good News of God's kingdom, Paul baptized Crispus and many of the Corinthians: "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized" (**18:8**). Do you believe in the Lord? If so, have you been baptized? If you wish to commit your life to Jesus and demonstrate your acceptance of God's message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, you should respond to the message of salvation by accepting Christian baptism.

APOLLOS' AND JOHN'S BAPTISM

Apollos was a learned man and a man "with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" (**Acts 18:24**). Even though, in the words of Luke, "He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John" (**18:25**), he still did not understand the baptism of the Great Commission. As a result of this lack of proper understanding of Christian baptism, Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos "to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (**18:26**). This is given as an introduction leading up to Paul's engagement with certain ["about twelve men in all"—**19:7**] These particular believers in Ephesus knew only the baptism of John (**19:1-7**).

Since they had not been baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus" (**19:5**), they were baptized again: "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.' He told the people 'to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (**19:4-5**). If baptism is nonessential, then, why were they baptized again? Is it because of the command of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**?—"baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**28:19**). If baptism is from above, and it is, how can one reject the counsel of God? Why not demonstrate one's faith in the Good News of salvation by grace through submitting oneself to Christian baptism?

CONCLUSION

Even though one may not understand the full implications of baptism and its relationship to salvation, the following comments should enhance one's appreciation for baptism in God's scheme of redemption. For example, in baptism, one experiences the end of the old aeon and the beginning of the new aeon. In Christ, one becomes a new creation. It is through baptism that Christ's death becomes the death of every believer. In other words, the Christ event—death, burial, and resurrection—is present in the baptismal event. Another insight about baptism is that in baptism, one is transferred to Christ and is, at the same time, submerged in His death. For one to be buried with Him in baptism is a seal of the believer's dying with Him.

One can say without reservation, Christ's Death is my grave. In baptism, God,

through the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, opens for every believer a new life. Again, to be buried with Him is a seal of the believer's dying with Him. In baptism, Christ takes the penitent sinner into His own Death and Life. When believers share in His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection, they die to sin and come alive to righteousness. The baptized person is one who believes that he or she has eternal life through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. The new life for every Christian can only occur in the deed of Christ Himself—His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection. It is in and through baptism that one experiences participation in Him. Also, one can say that in baptism, one is incorporated into the Body of Christ. Christians ought also to look to the rite of baptism as their dedication of the new life in and through Jesus.

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[1]All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[2] This author, Dallas Burdette, speaks from experience. A Baptist minister baptized me as a teenager. Years later, I came under the influence of my uncle (E. H. Miller, 1909-1989), associated with the one-cup and nonSunday school Church of Christ. He informed me that I would need to be baptized again, which I did. After preaching for about five years in this movement, I responded to baptism again because I was not sure that I understood baptism to be "for the forgiveness of sins," still in the one-cup movement. For an analysis of this view, see Dallas Burdette, "Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 8 August 2006) located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under BAPTISM.

[3]As one undertakes the study of baptism, one has to take seriously the particular context in which the subject is mentioned or discussed. The Scriptures cited in this essay on baptism come from various and particular contexts. Christians often seek to reconstruct the texts on baptism to coincide with one's traditions. This essay is number four in this series. Even though there is some overlap from the other three, nevertheless, this paper focuses upon a particular aspect of baptism—participation in the Death, Burial, and Resurrecction of Jesus.

[a]25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[4] For a detailed discussion of baptism as a seal of one's redemption, one will find this in-depth discussion in Chapter 2 of this series (Baptism: Acknowledgement That God's Way Is Right).

[5] Olive Wyon, *On the Way* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), 17.

[6] F. W. Flemington, *The New Testament Doctrine of Baptism* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 54.

[b] Or *charge until Christ came*

[7] Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, Studies in biblical Theology, First Series, (London: SCM Press, 1950, reprint, 1973), 35.

ReBaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement

Dallas Burdette **September 20, 1999**

> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (**Acts 2:37-41**).[1]

INTRODUCTION

Is one's baptism valid if one does not specifically understand at the time of his/her baptism that it is "for the forgiveness of your sins"? If one misinterprets the precise moment that sins are remitted, does this mistake of the intellect invalidate baptism? Is baptism not legitimate if one does not believe that it is specifically "for the forgiveness of your sins"? Or is baptism authentic because one believes that Jesus is the Messiah? What makes baptism *true* or *false*? How does one determine what is or is not scriptural baptism? These are questions the reformers had to face. These are also questions that Christians must face today. Is it ever correct to rebaptize someone? Is the demand for rebaptism on par with the command by Paul for rebaptism among the Ephesians? If not, why not?

One's beliefs concerning this issue of rebaptism will determine one's reaction to others who do not understand at the time of their baptism that it is "for the forgiveness of

your sins." The crucial question is: Is one a Christian if he/she is not baptized with the specific understanding that baptism is "for the forgiveness of your sins"? If one is baptized to *obey God*, is his/her baptism solid? Is baptism for just one item, and nothing else? If baptism is not performed purposely "for the forgiveness of your sins," should one be rebaptized? Alexander Campbell met this controversy with strong opposition.[2] Not only did Campbell reject rebaptism, but David Lipscomb also responded with negative reaction against those who advocated rebaptism exclusively "for the forgiveness of your sins."[3]

ACTS 2:38 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

In the initial stage of the Stone/Campbell reformation Movement, "forgiveness of sins" was not associated with baptism.[4] In order to understand the implications of **Acts 2:38**, the reformers had to wrestle with the details of this Scripture. What does a literary reading of this verse set forth? In other words, what are the *commands* and what are the *promises* in **Acts 2:38**? Does this passage contain two or four commands? Or are there two commands and two blessings in this verse? Are "remission of sins"[5] and the "gift of the Holy Spirit" (KJV) blessings or commands? Are repentance and baptism commands or blessings? These are problems that challenged the early reformers. One of the many objectives of this essay is to search the primary sources of the early reformers to determine their reaction to rebaptism—for and against the practice.

Baptism and Forgiveness of Sins

The perception of rebaptism "for the forgiveness of your sins" is not something new for believers today. This practice of rebaptism entered the Stone/Campbell Movement early in its origin.[6] One of the most hotly debated and possibly the most misunderstood Scriptures in the New Testament is **Acts 2:38**. This passage is still utilized by many well-meaning believers to demand rebaptism and to separate themselves from other believers who were not baptized with the view to remission of sins, that is to say, remission *after* baptism, not *before* baptism.[7] **Acts 2:38** is employed by some members of the Churches of Christ to substantiate their belief that they and they alone belong to Christ. In other words, anyone who was not immersed with the understanding that baptism is specifically "for the remission of your sins" is not a part of God's community.

Thus, according to many Christians, a proper understanding of this blessing is the criterion by which one determines if one is or is not a child of God. To state more clearly, salvation is based upon an intellectual assent to this dogma of "for the forgiveness of your sins." This philosophy is saying, salvation hinges upon one's belief of two objects: (1) belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and (2) belief in baptism "for the forgiveness of your sins." Belief in number one is not sufficient for salvation without a belief in number two, so many advocate.

As a result of this conviction, many believers have concluded that those who practice immersion, but not precisely "for the forgiveness of your sins" have not been added to the Christian *ekklesia*. If one is baptized to *obey* God, this motive of obedience

alone, according to some, is not sufficient to validate baptism if one does not know the precise moment God remits sins.[8] If one is only baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**Matthew 28:19**), then, according to many Christians, this immersion into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not sufficient for *right* baptism. If one does not understand at the time of his/her baptism that it is "for the forgiveness of your sins," then one's baptism is null and void. It is feared that if one accepts other believers without a proper understanding of **Acts 2:38**, this will open the flood gate to acceptance of other believers as Christians. Consequently, as a result of this mind-set, many reason that Baptists are not Christians.

It is not uncommon for some members within the Churches of Christ to refuse to recognize believers in *other* denominations.[9] But this denial of acceptance was not the reaction of many of the forefathers within the Reformation Movement of the Churches of Christ. In fact, a large number held to the view that there were Christians within other denominations. Many of the early reformers accepted the Baptist as disciples of Christ.[10] For this reason, they objected to *reimmersion* of those who wanted to identify with the Reformation Movement initiated by the Campbells to bring about renovation within the Christian Church.

EARLY REFORMERS' VIEWS OVER REBAPTISM WITHIN THE REFORMATION MOVEMENT WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Some of the early pioneers—Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), Barton Stone (1772-1844), Walter Scott (1796-1861), David Lipscomb (1831-1917), Elisha G. Sewell (1830-1924), James A. Harding (1848-1922)—maintained that they were bringing about *reform* within the existing church of Christ, not restoration, but reformation.[11] According to the early pioneers of the Stone/Campbell Movement, the church did not cease to exist; thus, the freethinkers did not wish to bury living persons by rebaptizing them. They reasoned that it was against the law to bury a breathing human being. If someone had been baptized to obey God, then, that individual was alive in Jesus. According to the reformers, meeting under a denominational name did not prevent one from belonging to God's community of believers. In fact, the denominations spoke of themselves as the churches of Christ.

Few Christians today are aware of how or when the practice of rebaptism "for the forgiveness of your sins" began, or even what position(s) the pioneers of the Stone/Campbell Movement took toward this practice of rebaptism of believers. The general assumption seems to be that baptism "for the forgiveness of your sins" has been insisted upon from the beginning of the Reformation Movement as one of its hallmarks. However, the historical facts dealing with rebaptism speak otherwise. To illustrate this fact of negative response to rebaptism by the reformers, then, it is necessary to cite original sources to discover their feelings and practice about this peculiar procedure that is promoted by many Christians today. One such example is one of the first reformers, namely, Barton W. Stone.

Barton W. Stone

In 1807, three years after *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery*, Barton W. Stone sought to defend infant sprinkling, but his unsuccessful attempt resulted in his acceptance of immersion of believers as scriptural baptism. Following this concept of believers' baptism, Stone and his fellow Christian preachers immersed one another. At the time of these baptisms, neither Stone nor his fellow ministers associated "for the forgiveness of your sins" with baptism. But upon the discovery of this truth, Stone extended an invitation to accept Jesus based upon **Acts 2:38**; yet, this doctrine was not well received, and, as a result of this coolness, he continued to employ the use of the "Mourner's bench" until 1825. Stone commented upon this thumbs down attitude over **Acts 2:38** in his graphic description:

> The subject of baptism now engaged the attention of the people very generally, and some, with myself, began to conclude that it was ordained for the remission of sins. . . . Into the spirit of the doctrine I was never fully led, until it was revived by Brother Campbell, some years later.[12]

Alexander Campbell

Another early harbinger, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), also questioned the "mode" of baptism—immersion or sprinkling, which? Upon the birth of his fist child in 1812, he made a thorough investigation on the subject of infant baptism.[13] And, as a result of his research, he came to the conclusion that baptism is "immersion," not "sprinkling," and that baptism is for believers only.[14] Also, Campbell decided that Christian baptism could be performed upon a simple profession of faith, not just upon a "religious experience," as so many Christians practiced.[15] Following this inquiry, he, his father (Thomas 1763-1864), and five others were immersed (June 1812).[16]

In 1812, Campbell recorded his thoughts about the baptisms that took place in 1812. It is significant that "remission of sins" was not a part of the baptismal ceremony as is the practice among many Churches of Christ today. Campbell later reflected upon that momentous occasion by recalling his conversation with Matthias Luce (Luce was the one who did the baptizing in June of 1812.).

> I was immersed by a Regular Baptist, but not in a Regular Baptist way. I stipulated with Matthias Luce that I should be **immersed on the profession of the one fact, or proposition, that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God**, when I solicited his attendance with me on that occasion. He replied that it was not usual for the Baptist to immerse simply on that profession; but that he believed it to be scriptural. Fearing, however, to be called to account for it by some of his brethren, he solicited the attendance of Henry Spears, a very worthy brother, for whose undissemble piety I always cherish the highest regard, to accompany him and to hear the half of the censure which might fall upon him for this great aberration from the good old Baptist way. Brother Spears accompanied him, and **on this profession alone I was immersed**; nor have I ever immersed any person but upon the

same profession which I made myself (emphasis mine—R.D.B).[17]

It is generally taught that Alexander Campbell was immersed exclusively "for the remission of sins." Mistakenly, some believers still postulate that Campbell was immersed expressly "for the remission of sins" by Matthias Luce, but the historical facts do not corroborate this belief. The truth of the matter is, he was immersed "on the profession of the one fact, or proposition, namely, that Jesus was the Messiah the Son of God," nothing else. Twelve years after his baptism (1824), Campbell expresses concisely the same foundation of hope for the believer that he expressed in 1812:

> But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church. A Christian, as defined, not by Doctor Johnson, nor any creed-maker, but by one taught of Heaven, and in Heaven, is one that believes this ***one fact***, and has submitted to ***one institution,*** and whose deportment accords with the morality and virtue taught by the great Prophet. The one fact is, that ***Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah.***[18]

Well-grounded baptism, according to Campbell, hinged upon "The belief of one fact" (Jesus is the Messiah) and "submission to one institution expressive of it" (baptism). Campbell's stress was <u>not</u> upon "remission of sins,"[19] but upon the belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Since Campbell did not understand "for remission of sins" at the time of his baptism, was he still a Christian or a child of Satan? Was Campbell a member of God's community (church) on earth? If he was a Christian, then, one must accept Campbell's baptism as valid, based upon his belief that "Jesus the Nazarene is the Messiah." If one accepts Campbell's baptism, how can Christians reject the baptisms of other believers as invalid?

Baptism "for the remission of sins" gradually developed in Campbell's thinking. But, in the earlier stages of his development of Christian baptism, Campbell's theology of baptism did not include "remission of sins" with immersion until he developed his arguments against infant baptism with McCalla (1823). It is significant that Campbell did not associate "for the remission of sins" with baptism until this debate. It is also noteworthy that eleven years transpired between Campbell's baptism and this debate. Even though Campbell introduced this concept in the McCalla debate, it was Walter Scott (1796-1861)—four years after the debate—who pioneered this doctrine of "for the remission of sins" and put this concept into his preaching, not Alexander Campbell.[20] Campbell later sympathized with those who did not understand its great importance. He composed his feelings by saying:

> We can sympathize with those who have this doctrine in their own creeds unregarded, and unheeded in its import and utility; for we exhibited it fully in our debate with Mr. McCalla, 1823, without feeling its great importance,

> and without beginning to practice upon its tendencies for sometime afterwards.[21]

Neither Barton Stone (1772-1844) nor the Campbells were reimmersed after discovering another blessing inherent in baptism; namely, "remission of sins." This is not only true of these men, but there were others who responded to the "good news" of God that did not understand "remission of sins" as one of the blessings bestowed through immersion. For example, Robert Richardson (1806-1876) mentions Walter Scott, Elder Bently, and others who did not comprehend "for remission of sins" (KJV) at the time of their immersion. Richardson authored the following comments:

> Mr. Scott, Elder Bentley, and some others of the prominent preachers, were indeed aware that Mr. Campbell had spoken of it at the McCalla debate as a pledge of pardon, but in this point of view it was, as yet, contemplated only *theoretically*, none of them having so understood it when they were themselves baptized, and being yet unable properly and practically to realize or apprehend its importance in this respect.[22]

Walter Scott first began preaching baptism "for the remission of sins" in 1827.[23] He had astounding success and baptized hundreds "for the remission of sins" as he cited **Acts 2:38** in support of his new found truth. Scott's teaching is a landmark, not because it was the first time this understanding of baptism had been set forth in the Reformation Movement, but because it marked the turning point in preaching on this subject of baptism. Even though Campbell had previously related "remission of sins" with immersion (1823), nevertheless, Walter Scott deserves the credit for making an explicit and pragmatic application of immersion related to "remission of sins." Richardson wrote:

> It was, however, reserved for Walter Scott, a few years later, to make a direct and practical application of the doctrine, and to secure for it the conspicuous place it has since occupied among the chief points urged in the Reformation.[24]

Also, Richardson chronicles the first person to be immersed in the Stone/Campbell Reformation Movement "for the remission of sins." He informs his readers that that man was Mr. William Amend. He then tells his readers that Mr. Amend responded to the preaching of Scott on November 18, 1827; he was the first person to be baptized specifically for this reason. Richardson elaborates on this scene:

> The people were filled with bewilderment at this strange truth brought to their ears, and now exemplified before their eyes in the baptism of a penitent for a purpose which now, on the 18th of November, 1827, for the first time since the primitive ages was fully and practically realized.[25]

With the introduction of "for the remission of sins" as an element of baptism, needless to say, this idea created uneasiness on the part of many who did not understand this blessing at the time of their baptism. This controversy over the design of baptism "for

the remission of sins" created doubts in the minds of many believers concerning the validity of their own baptism prior to this discovery. Should they be rebaptized? This question was the "big question" in the minds of so many who wanted to be true to the Word of God. Alexander Campbell responds to the question of rebaptism by saying, "No." In fact, in 1832, Campbell addresses the following argument to a fictitious opponent who championed the rebaptism position.

> Why on all your definitions of the kingdom, supposing, as you do, that he that is not formally and understandingly immersed for the remission of his sins cannot enter into this kingdom of heaven; and it being a fact that before the year 1823, since the fifth century, baptism for the remission of sins was not preached, and not until the year 1827 were many immersed with this apprehension of the subject. The dilemma in which your assumption fairly places you is this—either the promise of God has failed, or such persons as were baptized as you were the first time, are in the kingdom.[26]

Campbell's argument is that if "for remission of sins" must be known at the time of immersion in order for baptism to be accurate, then the church of Christ ceased to exist for several hundred years. He surmised that that which makes baptism legitimate is not that you believe it is "for the remission of sins," but rather that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He rationalized correctly that "for remission of sins" is not a command, but rather an executive act of pardon that takes place in the mind of God. Repentance and baptism demonstrates man's response to God's favor extended to him in the sending of His Son for man's atonement.

Campbell also understood **Acts 2:38** as containing two commands and two blessings—not four commands. In other words, when one responds to repentance and baptism, God showers the respondent with two gifts: (1) "remission of sins," and (2) "gift of the Holy Spirit" (KJV). In **Acts 2:38,** one discovers two commands (repentance and baptism) and two blessings (forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit). One cannot do the latter (these are promises), only the former (these are commands). In other words, men and women react through repentance and baptism; on the other hand, God awards through forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.[27]

Twenty Years After Campbell's Baptism

Approximately twenty years after Campbell's baptism, he still preferred not to add "for the remission of sins" to the formula in baptism. Richardson has an insightful comment on Campbell's procedure in baptism (The following quotation appears above, but this insight concerning Campbell's procedure is worthy of double notice):

> Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the "power of remitting sins" and "washing away sins in baptism." "These," said he, "have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers." The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone

baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, "Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and forbore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression "for the remission of sins." "When any doctrine," said he (Mil. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), "is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes."[28]

David Lipscomb and Rebaptism

Even with Campbell's arguments, the rebaptism controversy continued to strain the Christian community. Several years later, David Lipscomb (1831-1917) addresses this same issue of rebaptism. Sincerity existed on both sides of the point in question. The preposition "for" created the difficulty. The rebaptism debate centered on the meaning of this preposition in **Acts 2:38**. Lipscomb's lengthy article on "Rebaptism Reviewed" is extremely helpful in understanding the mind-set on both sides of the matter of contention. [29] One cannot demonstrate this point of baptism more clearly than by quoting at length from Lipscomb:

> I am glad to have this article from Brother Chism. He presents the points in a clear and tangible form so they can be understood. I believe the question ought to and can be settled with all who desire to follow the will of the Lord and are willing to study and abide by his teachings.
>
> Some object to the name "rebaptism." It is a re-immersion. The twelve at Ephesus were rebaptized. I believe persons ought to be rebaptized sometimes, and I call it "rebaptism." I am glad of Brother Chism's article because it places the practice on a ground that does not savor of infidelity. I feel shocked when professed Christians ask where the Bible says we must be baptized to obey God. It shows how little they know of the Bible or how ready they are to sacrifice the fundamental principles of the Bible to sustain a pet theory or a party.
>
> Brother Chism justifies the rebaptism practice on the ground that "for the remission of sins" in the sentence, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" in the sentence, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," is a part of the command, and this seems to be the chief ground on which he bases the practice. I believe "into" is preferable to "for" but he seems to prefer "for." But if "*eis*" or "for," here is a part of the command, what becomes of the argument that it means "in order to obtain," that Brother Chism and others make on the design of baptism with the sects? If it is a reward for obedience to the command, it cannot be a part of the command. That argument on this position is all wrong. It cannot be at once a part of the command and a reward for obedience to the command. Webster defines "for": "The antecedent cause or occasion of an action." It cannot be the promise as a result of the obedience and the obedience itself. I believe it should be "into," indicating a result flowing from the act, so only

indirectly a motive leading to it. There is certainly nothing in the sentence that demands it should be a part of the command.

If there is uncertainty about it, let us test in another safe way. Let us interpret it by other similar scriptures. Take Acts 3:19: "Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." No one would say "that your sins may be blotted out" is a part of the command. It is a result to which obedience to the command leads. It is the same as "for the remission of sins" in Acts 2:38. "That your sins may be blotted out," or remitted, or forgiven, mean the same. The forgiveness is the act of God, and man cannot obey or do God's part in any work. He can only "repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ"; and leave God to forgive his sins when he has complied with God's requirements.

These suggestions are a full reply to Brother Chism's points. But I examine further. He says the command, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," is the exact equivalent of the commission given by the Lord. This is wrong. It is the application of that general law to one special case, and it is a mistake to interpret and restrict the general law by one special application of it. Numbers of our rebaptist friends ignore the commission altogether and find the law only in the application of it. (Acts 2:38) God first gave the law and then the application of it. Brother Chism reverses God's order, passes by the general law, begins with one special application of it and then restricts the law to this one application. This is as if a lawyer were to find a man tried for stealing a horse. The general law against stealing is applied by the court to this one of horse stealing, and the lawyer afterwards restricts the law against stealing to this one case and insists that the law is not violated unless a horse is stolen. Brother Chism finds the first in their guilt they ask if pardon is possible, and they are told: "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and your sins shall be remitted." To be baptized in the name of Christ is to be baptized as Christ directs—"Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," for in them remission of sins, which they so earnestly sought, would be found. But is that the only blessing that is to be found in these names that can or should move men to seek God?

But Acts 2:38 is the commission applied to that particular case. Mark (16:15, 16) says: "God ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Is "shall be saved" a part of the command in this case? Is it an obligation imposed on man? Does the obligation of man end with being baptized, and is not a promise to man to encourage him, in his weakness and infirmity, to believe and be baptized? Brother Chism will not contradict this. Does not "be saved" correspond exactly to "for [or "into"] the remission of sins?" There is no command in the remission of sins to men, but a promise of what God will do.

The commission by Matthew is: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." This is applied in Acts 2:38 to the condition of those present. The people were taught, believed, were commanded to be baptized into the name of Christ, into the remission of sins. To be baptized "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," because that is the only baptism Christ authorized. When they are baptized into these names, they are baptized into the remission of sins. Into these names, embracing remission of sins in common with all spiritual blessings, are results flowing from the obedience and constitute no part of the obedience. These different promises mean the same and cannot be a part of the obedience.

I think Brother Chism must agree to these points so far, and own "for remission" is a promise to lead to obedience. It is not the only promise. Other promises in Christ may lead as well as this one.

We both agree that remission of sins is a motive to lead to obedience. He seems to think it the only motive, or at least the leading and essential motive to lead to baptism, and without this as the leading and controlling motive the baptism is not acceptable to God. I do not believe this. I believe there is one motive that must be ruling, controlling, ever-present motive in all service to God, without which no service is acceptable to him. That is, we must do the service in the name of Jesus, the Lord. "Whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Col. 3:17.) All Jesus did in heaven and on earth was done to please his Father. Nothing can be done in his name that is not controlled by the same desire. The law was: Be baptized "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." This is frequently expressed by "in" or "into" the name of the Lord Jesus." To be in one of these names or person is to be in all. In Christ are many blessings; no human being can know all. God has revealed a few that appeal to our conditions of the persons. Acts 2:38 is not the only application of this commission to the conditions of man.

Take the case of the Samaritans. They had been wicked; the Jews despised them and refused to let them worship with them; but despite their surroundings, they were willing to obey God. The heart of the Almighty is very tender toward those unfortunately situated but willing to obey him. Those who fail to see this are ill fitted to understand and obey God. God sent his servant to the Samaritans. "When they believed Philip preaching good things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." In the name of Jesus remission of sins were enjoyed, but in his name and kingdom are many other precious blessings.

Then there is the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a God-fearing man. He had come several hundred miles to worship God according to his appointments. He was studying God's word. God was so well pleased with him that he

sent his servant to teach him the way of the Lord more perfectly. He preached Jesus to him. He asked and was baptized into Christ. I do not think "for the remission of sins" was made prominent in this conversion, because he was serving God according to the best light he had and was guilty of no great sin.

Then, Cornelius was a Gentile, a good man according to the light he had. He worshipped God. Peter said he feared God and worked righteousness; that commended him to the favor of God, who sent his angel to him. His alms and his prayers were treasured as a memorial before God. Peter told him he was out of Christ, out of God, and he was "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Was much stress laid on "the remission of sins" in this case? He was baptized in the name of Christ, to obey God. Brother Chism, if you had been there, could you have objected to receiving Cornelius unless "for the remission of sins" was present and controlling motive in his baptism? The very same Peter that told the bloody-handed murderers to be baptized "for the remission of your sins" tells Cornelius to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ," and said nothing of remission of sins. Why the difference?

Then those at Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7). They were serving God according to the best light they had, had been baptized into John's baptism "for the remission of sins." They had not learned that John's baptism had been superseded by baptism "into the name of the Lord Jesus," as prescribed in the commission. When they heard these things, "they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus."

No emphasis was laid on "for remission" in these cases, but great emphasis on "into the name of the Lord Jesus," as prescribed in the commission. The law was applied to suit the condition of the person. The apostles did not believe that stealing a horse was the only stealing that could be done nor that remission of sins is the only motive to lead men to obey God. Why are not all these applications of the case as much for our instruction as Acts 2:38? Why is not the command to be baptized into Christ, into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, as much the command of God as "for remission of sins"? why is it not as important that men understand baptism is into Christ as to understand it is for the remission of sins? If we follow the Bible up, we find that in the writings to the churches and to Christians the emphasis is laid on having been baptized into Christ, having put on Christ, and living, dying, and being raised in Christ.

There are now cases corresponding in state to these cases of conversion in Acts. I could mention many. The girl mentioned by Brother Holt that had likely, like Timothy, known the Scriptures from a child, wished to obey Christ, but, not oppressed with the guilt of sin, she had not studied that point. Would the Father reject her because she wanted to follow Christ in her innocency and her youth?

While man is to love and trust God because God is good and blesses those

> that do his will, the idea that we must know what we are to get for and in each service, and that our service is acceptable only as we understand and render the obedience for the blessings we are to get, is repulsive to God. Abraham was the great model of faith for all future generations of the world. He followed God from his father's home, not knowing whither he went or what he would receive.
>
> In the service that was most pleasing to God, the offering of his son as a sacrifice, which secured the promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Abraham obeyed without a promise whether any blessing would be received. The obedience seemed to defeat the promise that God would of his son make a mighty nation. The antitype of Abraham's offerings of his son was God offering his only Son to die for the world. This is continually held up as the great example given to man to follow. It places the truth beyond all controversy that God is best pleased with the service that is rendered him at great sacrifice, from love of him, without any promise of blessing. Job said: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." That is the service God loves. We have other thoughts along this line we wish to offer.[30]

In addition to Lipscomb, there were others who also wrote against the practice of rebaptizing for the specific purpose of "for remission of sins." For example, E. G. Swell (1830-1924), James A. Harding (1848-1922), John F. Rowe (1827-1897), F. B. Srygley (1859-1940), F. W. Smith (1858-1930), and J. C. McQuiddy (1858-1924).[31] This cloud of witnesses did not make "remission of sins" the criterion whereby they determined if one's baptism was authentic. This controversy still continues to rage like wild fire. Allen also refers to two other outstanding contemporary Church of Christ preachers—B. C. Goodpasture (1895-1977) and C. A. Norred (1888-1969)—in this century that did not make a conscious understanding of "remission of sins" a prerequisite for sound baptism. In other words, they accepted those who had not been immersed expressly for this purpose. [32]

Campbell's Dialogue on Re-immersion

Returning to the rebaptism controversy in 1832, Campbell develops forceful arguments against the procedure of rebaptism.[33] In order to expose what he considered fallacies in the arguments in favor of reimmersion, he sets up a dialogue on reimmersion between two fictitious characters—Alexander (A) and Rufus (R). Rufus argues for rebaptism and Alexander argues against rebaptism. In this dialogue, Campbell fights against rebaptizing individuals who were baptized upon the confession of faith in Jesus the Messiah, even though they may have labored under the impression that their sins were remitted six months before they were baptized. The following is Campbell's scenario in which he represents two individuals (Alexander and Rufus) discussing the subject of rebaptism:

A. Have you really been baptized?

R. Not re-baptized in my sense of the word; for I regard my former baptism as nothing better than infant sprinkling.

A. If no better than infant sprinkling, you certainly ought to have been baptized. But you must mistake the meaning of that essay, if you suppose it regarded infant sprinkling as Christian immersion. It applies not to such a hypothesis. What I designate re-immersion, is the immersion of one a second time, who had voluntarily and understandingly confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God; and as such cheerfully submitted to him, and was immersed into his name as Mediator, as Prophet, Priest, and King. Were you not immersed upon such a profession some ten years ago?

R. I was about that time immersed without understanding the meaning of it, and had no respect to the immersion of my sins in immersion: for I believed that I was forgiven six months before my immersion, through faith in the blood of Jesus.

A. You had faith, then, in the blood of Jesus, and consequently regarded him as the Messiah.

R. Yes: I had faith in him, indeed: but I was not immersed for the remission of my sins. I was immersed because Jesus was immersed in the Jordan, and because he commanded all believers to be immersed.

A. And such a baptism as this you now say is no better than no baptism or than infant sprinkling. Does an infant act at all, does its understanding, will, affections, or conscience feel or act in reference to the example, authority, command, or promise of Jesus Christ? Surely you confound things that differ, the breath and length of heaven.

R. Oh! There is some difference, indeed! But as touching the remission of sins, an infant as much expected it in its sprinkling, as I in my first immersion.

A. That may be, for you say that you thought; nay, were assured, that your sins were remitted six months before you were immersed. But this, in my judgment, constitutes no reason why you should, after ten years citizenship in the kingdom of Christ, be again immersed. When I was naturalized a citizen of these United States, there were certain immunities and privileges attached to citizenship which I had not in my mind at that time, nor were they any inducement to me to be naturalized, any more than to that child now sleeping in the arms of its mother. But did that circumstance annul my naturalization and leave me an alien?

R. I dare not say there was no church of Christ, no kingdom of God all this time. But I will say the church was in the wilderness.

A. That helps you not. It was still a church, although it was in the wilderness; and this destroys your assumption. I admit that he who understands not

fully the Lord's day, the Lord's supper, and Christian immersion, cannot fully enjoy the blessings of the gospel of Christ, and that it makes all the difference between the wilderness and the fruitful field to understand fully these institutions: but yet there are degrees both in faith and knowledge; and he that lives in the wilderness still lives.

R. I am candid to confess that I did not foresee this impediment in my way. But, come, does this greatly detract from the importance which you and others attach to the discovery of the capital item of the ancient gospel—baptism for the remission of sins? This indeed is the only item which obtains for the ancient gospel the eminence which it claims.

A. Not in the least. It stands true that this is its proper meaning. The not understanding of this institution has prevented many Christians from enjoying its benefits; but the not understanding it does not make them aliens from the kingdom of Jesus.[34]

Dr. John Thomas' Controversy and Rebaptism

The rebaptism debate, in part, began with Dr. John Thomas (1805-1871). The rediscovery of "remission of sins" associated with baptism was bound to lead, sooner or later, to someone's questioning whether baptism could be accurately administered to a person who did not understand that particular aspect of the ordinance. In the early stages of the Stone/Campbell Movement, Dr. Thomas was apparently the first person to emphasize rebaptizing those who did not understand "for the remission of sins" at the time of their baptism. Alexander Campbell quoted from the *Religious Herald*, a journal hostile to the Stone/Campbell Movement, which was eager to point out the differences between Campbell and Thomas on rebaptism. The article quickly points out Campbell's objection to Dr. Thomas' views and practice on rebaptism:

> Progress of the Reformation—re-baptism—We understand that Mrs. Dr. Thomas was recently re-baptized for the remission of sins. Mrs. T. had previously been baptized on a profession of her faith, as we understand, by Mr. Burnet the Reformer. Recently her mind had become disquieted as to the validity of her baptism. Being confined to her room, and yet anxious to have the ordinance readministered, a bathing-tub was procured, carried into her room, filled with warm water, and Mrs. T. immersed for the remission of her sins, by Mr. Joseph Woodson, one of the members of the Sycamore church. Mr. Campbell objects to this amendment of his new theory—but who shall decide when Doctors disagree?[35]

Campbell's "Extra" for December 1837 analyzed a number of opinions of Dr. Thomas that he regarded as discordant inclinations. One of these heretical trends was reimmersion of immersed believers. Campbell penned:

> His re-immersion for the Baptist, and his no prayer system of preaching the word together with his representing all those immersed among the Baptists as immersed antichrist, are strong indications of the schismatical drift of our

Apostolic Advocate.[36]

This statement of Campbell concerning the Baptists is not a well-known fact, at least as far as I can detect in my conversations with various believers with a Church of Christ background.[37] Campbell entertained the notion, contrary to many Churches of Christ in the 20th century, that the Baptist were Christians. He opposed referring to the Baptist as "immersed antichrist." But, in the very beginning of the Stone/Campbell Movement, the reformers considered all baptized believers as members of the church of Christ. As one reads the primary sources, this acceptance of "other believers" in other denominations is self-evident.

ESCALATION OF THE REBAPTISM CONTROVERSY

The rebaptism issue grew into the third most significant controversy to plague the Church of Christ.[38] The other two thorns were the missionary societies and the mechanical instruments of music.[39] This particular controversy over baptism "for the remission of sins" reached its zenith with Austin McGary (1846-1928). McGary established the *Firm Foundation* (September 1884) for the purpose of advocating rebaptism for those who did not understand "for the remission of sins" at the time of their baptism.[40] He contended that when a man believed in Jesus, repented of his sins, and was baptized in order to "obey God," still, this obedience was not sufficient to become a child of God. One is <u>not</u> a child of God until he/she was baptized "for the remission of sins,"[41] according to McGary. Lipscomb responds to this position by writing:

> To take one truth or one motive out of a number given by God and say, "This one shall be understood, and the others need not be," is to do violence to the order of God, and is to crystallize a sect around a truth, wrested from its God-given place, ignoring other truths just as important. This is to form a sect.[42]

The battle rages over the practice of rebaptism, Lipscomb receives a letter of inquiry concerning the purpose of baptism: "Brother Lipscomb: What is baptism for, and what does John 3:5 mean?"[43] To this he replies:

> The leading purpose of baptism is to bury the man dead through faith and repentance to the world out of himself and raise him in Christ Jesus. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them [*eis*] in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit puts them into the enjoyment of all the blessings to be received in Christ, the blood of Christ, the remission of sins, the fellowship of God, Jesus Christ, and all the intelligences of the universe that are in fellowship with God.[44]

Again, Lipscomb receives another question related to baptism:

> Brother Lipscomb: Please answer in the columns of the Gospel Advocate if you do, or ever did, take the position that if a person came to you and said he believed that God for Christ's sake had pardoned his sins, you would try to teach him better, but, if you could not, that you would take and baptize him in that condition, believing that he was already saved. Please answer, as you are accused by several brethren of taking that position several years ago. I am a little over a year old in the gospel.[45]

To this question Lipscomb answers:

> I have never found where God has ever suspended the acceptability of man's service on man's knowing the moment God rewarded the service, or the time and reason of a blessing. If he has done this, I do not see who can be saved. The highest type of faith is that of Abraham. He did God's commands, left all and followed him, "not knowing whither he went. . . ." God made many promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of blessing, and how and when the blessing would come. They, through having their spiritual vision clouded by their surroundings, failed to understand the nature or special time of the divine promises; yet God never withheld the promise when in obedience to him they came to the appointed place. Christ so often and so plainly told the apostles that he would be crucified and raised from the dead the third day; yet their minds were so preoccupied with other views that they did not see or understand or believe it. They failed to believe it because they did not see it. They had confidence in Jesus and faith in the truth of his teaching, but the preoccupation of their minds with the idea of a temporal kingdom and earthly glory hindered their seeing the truth then. Jesus did not reject their service because they failed to see this, the most important item in his teaching. He knew, if led on to obey truly other truths they did see, that they would come to see the fullness of this truth.
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> Peter on Pentecost preached: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off." Yet he was slow to understand and believe the promise was to the Gentiles, because his prejudices were in the way. These prejudices were so blind when they were aroused, after he had opened the door to the Gentiles, they led him to refuse to eat with them as brethren. Yet his service was accepted. God makes allowance for human ignorance and human weakness, and accepts service despite much blindness and many errors, or we are all lost. It is only weak man, who imagines that he knows all truth, that makes service depend upon a perfect understanding of God's purpose and times. . . .
>
> The truth is, there are different motives given in the Bible to lead men to obedience. The highest, holiest motive to obedience is that which led Jesus—the desire to fulfill all righteousness—to do the will of God. I would fear much to meet Christ at the judgment seat of God if I rejected him who did what God commanded him, led by the motive that led Jesus Christ to obey him. When a man trusts God

> and honors him from the desire of obeying him, he acts from the motive that is more pleasing to God than any other. . . .
>
> Jesus said: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." (John 10:38) If they could not believe through the words of Jesus, yet could believe through his works, he was willing to accept them. Take this as an example: A man is born and reared in a Presbyterian family. From childhood he is taught to believe that infant sprinkling and all the practices of the Presbyterian Church are right. He lives in all good conscience and tries to do the will of God. In reading the Bible, he sees that God requires men to believe, then be baptized. He sees that baptism is a burial. In his anxiety to do the will of God, he is baptized, before his attention has ever been directed to the fact that is "for the remission of sins"; but he is moved by the same motive that led Jesus to be baptized—a desire to fulfill all righteousness. Who will say that man's baptism is not acceptable to God? Who will say he ought to defer a duty that he knows God requires at his hands until he learns all the blessings God will bestow, and just where and when each blessing will come in, and why it is bestowed? If that is necessary, no man can ever tell when he should be baptized. Such a contention arises from a very mistaken ides of God's character and of the ground of his mercy to man. The ground of God's mercy to man is not that man understands and knows how God works or the point when and where he bestows his blessing; but it is that man is weak, sinful, helpless, willing to trust God and follow him, not knowing whither he leads. . . . It is not necessary to understand all truth before he obeys what he does understand. [46]

Lipscomb Versus McGary

As the debate continued, Lipscomb pressures McGary to deny that Alexander Campbell or Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) or "that host of heroes" were Christians because they were not baptized purposely "for the remission of sins." McGary boldly answers that if Campbell was not baptized "for the remission of sins," then his baptism was null and void.[47] Undoubtedly McGary did not know that Campbell had not been baptized expressly "for the remission of sins," since he called him "brother." In addition to Lipscomb's discussions, James A. Harding (1848-1922) also conducted written debates with Austin McGary and J. D. Tant (1861-1941) on the subject of rebaptism.[48] Stephen Eckstein calls attention to the castigation of a number of well-known reformers by McGary:

> McGary retorted that Lipscomb and others who defended Baptist baptism were Cambellites. He sarcastically asserted that such men as J. W. McGarvey, F. W. Allen, Isaac Errett, J. A. Harding and J. M. Barnes of other states, Wilmeth and Rawlins, the Clarks, Carlton, McPherson, Homan and others taught that Baptists are "in Christ" and when they die, "strict Baptist, they go to rest in Jesus."[49]

Again, Eckstein writes: "The *Christian Courier* asserted that the church was suffering from the 'rebaptism hobby that is being furiously ridden' by a faction among the Disciples of Christ."[50] Another Journal (*Christian* Messenger) entered the rebaptism controversy. Once more Eckstein pens: "The *Christian Messenger* declared that rebaptism 'is so preposterous that it seems no man or woman with intellect to be accountable could be deceived by it. Yet this the delusion that is leading away hundreds of disciples in Texas at the present time.'"[51]

Tolbert Fanning

Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) also objected to rebaptizing those who were satisfied with their baptism, even the Baptist. He composed the following thoughts on the subject: "We teach the Baptist the Christian religion and after understanding the great facts, if they are satisfied with their baptism, I know of no brother who would not fellowship them."[52] The acceptance of members from the Baptist church without rebaptism was wide spread among the early Reformation preachers. James R. Wilburn says,

> Fanning and his associates, unlike their Baptist neighbors who commanded baptism "because of remission of sins, believed that immersion was necessary to salvation. Still, it was often the practice of preachers in the Churches of Christ to receive members into fellowship from the Baptist Church without rebaptism, even though the Baptist generally taught that salvation followed faith with baptism a subsequent event.[53]

Also, Wilburn quoted from the *Gospel Advocate* (1855—to present) and the Christian Review to substantiate this fact of not rebaptizing:

> We received two additions from the sects without baptism, seven by baptism, one restored, and one confession [to be baptized later], or again, 'The result of our meeting is nineteen additions to the cause of Primitive Christianity, four of whom were from the Baptist, and fifteen were immersed.[54]

Fanning delighted in the saying, "Though we are not the only Christians, we are Christians only."[55] Wilburn further writes about Fanning's refusal to deny that there were Christians among the denominations:

> While Fanning continually censored division, he was not prepared to deny that there were Christians in the denominations which he saw around him. "That there are Christians in confusion," said he, "we doubt not," and then later he wrote, "While we could cheerfully fellowship all who are pure and of good report in the denominations, should we admit the divine origin of any sect, this fact alone would certainly afford unmistakable evidence of insincerity."[56]

Harding Versus Tant

Lloyd Sears, in his biography of James A. Harding (1848-1922), describes one incident that should serve as a valuable practical example for Christians today. As he explains:

> On the "rebaptism" issue, which was threatening to divide the church, J. D. Tant was invited to give a series of lectures opposing the views of Harding and Lipscomb. L. S. Chambers relates that he was surprised to see Harding, after a lecture, put his arm around Tant and walk with him across the campus to Harding's home for dinner. He learned to his astonishment and his great joy that "brethren could be brethren though they differed."[57]

A lesson about brotherly love existed in their relationship to one another and to God. But this attitude did not last long among Christians. Around the turn of the century, as mentioned above in the "Lipscomb versus McGary" controversy, the rebaptism question again posed one of the greatest threats to the unity of the Spirit. With the rise of the *Firm Foundation* (1844—to present), this issue of contention reached its zenith—division occurred. In the face of great turmoil, Lipscomb and Harding and Sewell (1830-1924) still objected to rebaptism. Sears wrote about these three and the *Gospel Advocate* staff:

> On this issue David Lipscomb, Harding, E. G. Sewell, and the Advocate staff and readers in general held that the only requirements for baptism which are stipulated by Jesus and the apostles were a faith in Jesus as the Son of God, repentance, and confession.[58]

Sewell also responded to this controversy in *Questions Answered*. Someone (name withheld by Sewell) posed the question:

> Brother Sewell: Do Baptists baptize individuals into the Baptist Church or into the church of Christ? If into the church of Christ, how do they get into the Baptist Church? If into the Baptist Church, how must one proceed to come from the Baptist Church into church of Christ?[59]

The following citation is Sewell's reaction to the above question:

> I do not read one word about any Baptist Church in the new Testament, and, therefore, not a word about any one ever having been baptized into a Baptist Church. Hence, I shall not attempt to answer how such an unscriptural thing can be done, except to say that no such thing can be done by divine authority by any one. Nor do I read of any one ever having been baptized into the church of Christ. I do read of people being baptized into Christ and "into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." I read also, plainly, that Paul and the Romans "were baptized into Christ." ("Rom. 6:3)
>
> Then, again, I read where Christ said, when speaking of himself as the Son of God: "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it." (Mt. 16:18) I learn also that the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is rendered church, means literally the "called-out ones." Therefore the word church means the people that obey the gospel and are thus called out of the world into Christ. The word church, therefore, does not mean a denomination, but it means the Lord's people on earth; and these make up the spiritual body of Christ, but in no modern sense of that word a denomination.

The whole idea of a Baptist Church, and that such a church is a denomination, is purely human. There is nothing of that sort one single time named in the New Testament. Study the word church as given in the New Testament more closely, and you will not trouble yourself nor others about people being baptized into the Baptist Church. The whole idea is a human invention not once named in all the oracles of God.

The matter of being baptized into Christ, and that whenever this is done they are the Lord's people, is plainly revealed, but not in any sense as a Baptist denomination. I have been preaching for about sixty-two years, and have never had any one to come forward to unite with the church of Christ that said he had been baptized into the Baptist Church. If such a one ever does, I will try to teach and treat him as the word of God directs. . . . But I have found a number of people that said that when they were baptized they did it in submission to the will of God, and they were encouraged to at once take their stand among those who are simply Christians and to live the Christian life as the word of God directs. So I am in no dilemma in regard to the questions you ask.

But those that require all those who have been baptized to do God's will to be baptized again, "having in view that baptism is for the remission of sins," are the ones that are in the ditch, there being no authority in the word of God for any such procedure. There is but one way to get into the church of Christ, and that is by a humble obedience to the gospel of Christ. But I am under no obligation to try to tell how to get into the Baptist Church, as no such church is revealed in the word of God.[60]

From the above response by Sewell, one can surmise that there is no such thing as a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or, for that matter, a Church of Christ Church. There is only one *body* and that *body* consists of all those who put their trust in Jesus for salvation. The *ekklesia* of Christ had its origin in God and its beginning on the fiftieth day after Passover. From that day to this day, everyone who responds to the gospel of Christ through repentance and baptism is added to God's community (church) on earth.

REFORMATION VERSUS RESTORATION

The question that confronts every believer is: Is the Stone/Campbell Movement a Reformation Movement or Restoration Movement? The Stone/Campbell Movement started out as a Reformation Movement, but this call for reform eventually degenerated into a Restoration Movement. In other words, the Stone/Campbell Movement crystallized

into another denomination.[61] In its early stages the reformers were seeking to bring about reform within the existing churches, but, as time went on, many in this movement came to the conclusion that the church needed to be restored—there were no Christians in the denominations. This failure to make a distinction between the words *reformation* and *restoration* has created warring factions on every corner—each claiming to be the restored church. Rebaptism is a product of the *restoration mindset*.

Is there a valid distinction between a *reformation* movement and a *restoration* movement? An analysis of these two concepts reveals the distinguishing characteristics of these two various philosophies. For example, a Reformation Movement recognizes Christians in existing churches, that is to say, other Christian fellowships, and also seeks to bring about reform within the surviving movement. On the other hand, a Restoration Movement labors under the impression that the church ceased to exist and must be restored—such as the Anabaptist movement.[62]

The Campbells as well as other reformation preachers recognized that there were Christians in the denominations, but, nevertheless, they all sought to bring about reform within the Christian community. This is the same mind-set that earlier reformers—John Wycliff, (1330-1384), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564)—sought to accomplish. In other words these three men sought to bring about reformation within the existing church. But, on the other hand, Zwingli's movement was a true Restoration Movement.[63]

REBAPTISM IN ACTS 19

Acts 19 is appealed to by many Christians to uphold the practice of rebaptizing those who did not understand "for the remission of sins" at the time of their baptism. **Acts 19** is often cited as proof-text for this demand for rebaptism. The question of rebaptism still confuses many concerned Christians. Is there ever any reason for one to be rebaptized? Luke informs Theophilus that Paul rebaptized some believers at Ephesus because they had not been baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus," but rather they had previously been baptized under John's baptism. The question is: Is this act of rebaptism in Ephesus a valid reason to rebaptize those who were baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**Matthew 28:19**) according to Jesus' instructions to the disciples? Alexander Campbell's "Dialogue on Re-immersion" goes right to the heart of the matter in differentiating between the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of John. He writes:

A. (Alexander). They say they had not heard the name of the Holy Spirit mentioned as given. This at once astonished Paul. Why, says he, into what name, not for what gift, were you immersed, seeing you have not heard of the Holy Spirit? I need not repeat their answer. Paul was no longer astonished. He knew the name of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus went together; and that John immersed into no name. He only preached that they should believe in him that was to come after him. Paul explained the subject to them. When they heard this they were immersed *into* the name of the Lord Jesus. No special purpose of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in or after baptism. For they received this gift by imposition of hands. . . . Paul

laid his hands on them, they were baptized with a special reference to this gift. I need not now say to you that there is no authority for supposing that they did not receive baptism in its full sense; because there is no special exclusion of any one blessing common to others, nor reference to any one blessing as especially to be sought in the institution. No person, I think has authority to say they were not immersed for the remission of sins, or that they were immersed exclusively for the Holy Spirit; both of which seem to have been taken for granted by you, friend Matthias.[64]

The thrust of the command for rebaptism centered on: "into the name of the Lord Jesus." In other words, baptism is into *what name*, not *what gift.*

Context and Acts 19

What is **Acts 19** concerned with? This episode at Ephesus is a classic example of some who were reimmersed. But, why were they reimmersed? When one embarks upon an answer, one must always consult context.[65] The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God's written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that one attaches to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, the interpreter may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person's particular context tends to shape his/her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, "An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history."[66]

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. One must not employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. It is the context that informs the reader as to the reasoning of Paul in demanding their baptism "into the name of the Lord Jesus." The context reveals that they were not baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus." [67]

The reason assigned for rebaptism in **Acts 19** has to do with an inadequate or false fundamental teaching concerning baptism in the name of Jesus. John's baptism looked toward the coming of the Son of God, but Jesus had come. Now, everything, which includes baptism, must be done "into the name of the Lord Jesus" (**Acts 19:5**). There is no justification for the modern practice of rebaptizing individuals who were baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus." Whether one is baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" or "into the name of the Lord Jesus"—both are synonymous. After Peter's sermon about God's plan of salvation in the home of Cornelius, he, too, "ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (**Acts 10:48**).

As one reflects upon baptism as practiced by other Christians, one observes that they too baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In the words of Jesus as reported by Mark: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:16**). Anyone who believes and is baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" has a baptism that is as solid as a rock. One is not required to fully understand the efficacy of baptism in order for it to be pleasing and acceptable to God. If an individual is obedient to the gospel of Christ because of his/her faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the savior of the world, then, that person's baptism is legitimate.

Campbell, as well as many other reformers, saw emphatically the disastrous consequences of any other view. For this reason Campbell wrote:

> Let me once more say, that the only thing which can justify reimmersion into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is a confession on the part of the candidate that he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God—that he died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day, at the time of his first immersion—that he now believes the testimony of the Apostles concerning him, and desires to be buried and rise with Christ in faith to a resurrection to eternal life. The instant that rebaptism is preached and practiced on any other ground than that now stated—such as deficient knowledge, weak faith, a change of views—then have we contradicted in some way and made void the word of the Lord—"He who will believe and be immersed shall be saved"—then have we abandoned the principles of the present reformation, instituted experience meetings, committees for examining candidates, changed the bond of union, and made something else than belief of the gospel facts the faith of the gospel."[68]

MANY BLESSINGS ASSOCIATED WITH BAPTISM

One cannot deny that the Holy Spirit associates various gifts, effects, blessings, and fellowship with the Trinity in water baptism. The following is a brief list of benefits associated with baptism: (1) forgiveness of sins [**Acts 2:38**],[69] (2) union with Christ [**Galatians 3:26ff**], release from the power and guilt of sin as well as sharing in the risen life of the Redeemer [**Romans 6:1-11**], and (4) regeneration [**Titus 3:5**]. In water baptism, God showers many blessings upon penitent sinners. God in his infinite wisdom has prepared a way for man to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Savior of the world (**Romans 6:3-5**).

The question that confronts many Christians is: Must one understand the full implications concerning the benefits associated with baptism and, at the same time, posses full knowledge about baptism in **Matthew 28:18-19**? For example, Jesus informs the disciples that when one is baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (**Matthew 28:19**), then that person enters into a covenant relationship with the Trinity. But how many understand, at the time of their baptism, this particular blessing designated in water baptism? How many understand that God gives "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**) at the time of baptism as an earnest of his/her inheritance (**Ephesians**

1:13-14).[70]

If one believes and is baptized in compliance with **Mark 16:16**,[71] is his/her baptism valid? If one's baptism is not valid, then one cannot help but wonder, why not? One objective of baptism is to rise with Him through the faith of the operation of God (**Colossians 2:12**).[72] Must one be aware of all the implications in the various viewpoints about baptism for it to be genuine? Does the weight of one's baptism depend upon one's awareness that baptism is "for the remission of sins? Or does the authenticity of one's baptism rest upon one's belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? The question that confronts every believer is: Is it *what* you believe about baptism that matters, or is it in *whom* you believe that determines the realness of baptism?

J. M. Powell lists twenty-two purposes for being baptized. Must one get the picture of each and every reason for baptism before it is valid? The following is a brief description of the twenty-two objectives accomplished in baptism as enumerated by Powell:

> There are many purposes of water baptism mentioned in the New Testament; among which we mention the following. 1. Salvation, (Mark 16:16); 2. Sins remitted, (Acts 2:38); 3. Sins washed away, J (Acts 22:16); 4. Puts on Christ, (Galatians 3:27); 5. Puts off past sins, (Colossians 2:11, 12); 6. Gets one into Christ (Galatians 3:27); 7. Gets one into the body of Christ, (1 Corinthians 12:13); 8. Call on the name of the Lord, (Acts 22:16); 9. The right to wear the name of Christian (1 Corinthians 1:10-15); 10. Raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12); 11. Becomes a child of God, (Galatians 3:26,27); 12. Sins are forgiven, (Sins are forgiven (Colossians 2:11, 12); 13. Becomes a new creature, (2 Corinthians 5:17); 14. Contacts the blood of Christ, (Romans 6:3, 4); 15. Receives a good conscience, (1 Peter 3:21); 16. Cleansed, (Ephesians 5:26); 17. Set apart for Christian worship and service (Ephesians 5:26); 18. Baptized into the death of Christ, (Romans 6:3, 4); 19. Born again (John 3:3-5); 20. Receives all spiritual blessings in Christ, (Ephesians 1—3); 21. Added to the Lord's church, (Acts 2:41, 47); 22. We are baptized into the name of Christ, (Matthew 28:19).[73]

Baptized Into Nothing?

With some Christians, one's baptism is nothing if it is practiced by other groups who do not baptize with the specific formula "for the forgiveness of sins." In other words, when other groups baptize individuals, it is into *nothing*, not into Christ. This position on baptism is the reason why many Christians within the Churches of Christ do not recognize other believers' baptisms. Jimmy Allen, professor of Bible at Harding University, responds to this kind of attitude in his book on *Re-Baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again:*

> **Baptized Into Nothing**

Objection:

If one believes there are scripturally immersed people in denominations, he must believe a person can be baptized into nothing. A fellow Christian said,

Some strange brethren among us take the position that one can be scripturally baptized into a denominational church. His sins are forgiven they say but he begins worshipping in error. If he learns the truth, upon confessing his error, not being baptized again, Christ will accept him into His church, it is supposed. Is it possible to be baptized into nothing? In the eyes of the Lord denominational churches are not part of his plan to save man and do not exist!!! The church of our Lord DOES exist and one MUST be baptized into the Body of Christ which is the church (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:21-22).

Response:

1. It is wondered if Lipscomb, Harding, Sewell, McQuiddy, Srygley, et.al. were "strange brethren" because they believed there were born-again people in denominational groups. Our brother thinks some of us are strange because we do not agree with him. Strange means "not according to the ordinary way." Had he lived a hundred years ago, his would have been the minority view, and he would have been regarded as "strange." Obviously, labels do not prove beliefs to be either right or wrong.

2. The objection does not allow for division to exist in the body of Christ. It is wrong for brethren to be divided (1 Cor. 1:10-15); however, division does exist. Suppose one in the anti-cooperation fellowship should immerse a person who understood sins were remitted in baptism. Would the individual not be made part of the body of Christ because the anti-cooperatives are not in fellowship with us? This same reasoning can be applied to the anti-Bible class people, one-container brethren, instrumental-music folks, and those in the premillennial movement. All teach that immersion is essential to salvation, but each has a distinct fellowship. Are they baptizing into nothing?

3. No one is scripturally baptized into a denomination, and this is true of those whom we immerse, although they may initially have a denominational view of the church. One can be baptized in obedience to God's command (Mark 16:16) and at the same time have the mistaken view that immersion makes him a member of a party. He is wrong about the party, but he is right about obedience. Repeatedly, it is said in this work that it is obedience to the truth that causes the Lord to add one to the body, which is the church. If the error held invalidates the truth, then no one received remission at baptism, since all of us had some misconceptions when we were immersed. All honest people will admit that because of ignorance and misunderstanding, they still do not know everything about water baptism.[74]

Campbell and the Baptism Formula

The stature of Alexander Campbell warrants the inclusion again of a quote from Robert Richardson in which he expresses the sentiments of Campbell's feeling about the enforcement or use of formulas in baptizing. Richardson writes:

> Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the "power of remitting sins" and "washing away sins in baptism." "These," said he, "have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth, and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers." The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, "Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and forebore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression "for the remission of sins." "When any doctrine," said he (Mill. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), "is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes." [75]

CONCLUSION

The early reformers were not immersed with a consciousness of "remission of sins" flashing like neon lights at the time of their baptisms. The pioneers set forth their objections to the practice of rebaptizing individuals who were baptized upon the confession of their faith that Jesus is the Son of God. This essay has drawn upon original sources to set forth the beliefs of sincere godly men. One observes from this composition that equally devout men advanced different views. This essay has sought to present the players in the Stone/Campbell Movement in their own historical setting in order to draw the present day readers into the thinking and arguments of the original preachers and editors of the new reform movement against the practice of reimmersion.

Since the reformers give a clear picture of their own thoughts, then this article gives lengthy citations from the original fountains. Even though many of the quotes are quite lengthy, nevertheless, the citations are worth repeating at some length. In view of the fact that many of their original sayings have been divorced from their historical dimension, this paper has sought a reconciliation of the *Sitz im Leben*[76] (social setting) for a proper interpretation of the intended meanings by the reformers. In seeking an answer to this perplexing problem of reimmersion, it is the duty of every believer to apply sound methods of exegesis[77] to the original texts of Scripture.

This extended survey of "Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement" should assist many Christians to exercise more toleration toward those who have not arrived at the same conclusions as themselves. Every prayer to God should call upon God to help all believers to understand that the overriding factor in baptism is one's desire to obey God. The Scriptures teach that anyone baptized into the name of Jesus is a part of God's kingdom. One's longing to submit to God is the dominant principle for legitimacy in any

baptism.

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise. This article was originally written on December 15, 1992.

[2] See Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Indiana: Religious Book Service, 1897), 2: 444, where he jots down:

> Mr. Campbell had, however, always been entirely opposed to the practice of reimmersion upon such trivial grounds as were alleged in favor of it, believing it to be in all cases valid where there was a sincere belief in Christ, however uninformed the baptized person might be at the time with regard to the nature or design of the institution. Nothing, he justly thought, could ever justify reimmersion, except a consciousness on the part of the individual that at his first baptism he was destitute of faith in Christ.

See also, Alexander Campbell, "Rebaptism," *Millennial Harbinger* 2, no. 2 (November 7, 1831): 483, where he voices his views against a second baptism for a particular purpose:

> To be baptized a second time for the remission of sins by itself, or for the Holy Spirit by itself, or for any one blessing, is without command, precedent, or reason from the New Testament. . . .
>
> But were not many of John's disciples baptized again? Not one of them was baptized twice into John's baptism; but some of them were once baptized into Jesus Christ. John baptized not into the name of the Lord Jesus, but into reformation, saying that "his disciples should believe in him that was to come after him." There is neither precedent nor analogy to support this practice.

[3] See David Lipscomb, "Rebaptism Reviewed" *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 272-793. Cited in Jimmy Allen, *Re-baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again* (Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1991), 99—108. See also Lipscomb and Sewell, *Questions and Answers* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1974), 49.

[4] See Richardson, *Memoirs,* 2: 207. Again, Richardson captures the absence of a consciousness of remission of sins associated with baptism when he pens:

> No special promises were recognized as connected with it, and it was very unusual to hear this subject presented at all, except when some one was about to be baptized. Mr. Scott, Elder Bentley and some others of the prominent preachers, were indeed aware that Mr. Campbell had spoken of it at the McCalla debate as a pledge of pardon, but in this point of view it was, as yet, contemplated only *theoretically,* none of them having so understood it when they were themselves baptized, and being yet unable properly and practically to realize or appreciate its importance in this respect.

[5] *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) 1982.

[6] See Alexander Campbell, "Re-immersion and Brother Thomas," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 2 (February 1836): 56-64.

[7] See Dan Winkler, "The Present Day Discussion About: Baptism," in Jim Laws, Lectureship Director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993), 385—399. See also William Woodson, "Preface," in William Woodson, ed., *Change Agent and Churches of Christ* (TN: Sain Publications, 1994), 5, where he bemoans the practice of not making an understanding of "for the remission of sins" mandatory for baptism. He says, "That baptism for the remission of sins is not mandatory to be understood and present in one's becoming a Christian." Again, see Ted Knight, "False Teaching on Baptism," in *Heaven's Imperatives Or Man's Innovations: Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?* Curtis Cates, ed., 1995 Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship (TN: Sain Publications, 1995), 353—361.

[8] See Lipscomb, "Rebaptism Reviewed," 49, for an overview of this mind-set—obey alone is not sufficient for valid baptism. Lipscomb refutes the notion that one must understand that baptism is for the remission of sins in order for it to be acceptable to God. This article in quoted in this paper—see under caption: David Lipscomb and Rebaptism.

[9] Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement, he wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," ***Millennial Harbinger,*** New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556 (emphasis mine—RDB).

[10] See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 675, where he relates a conversation that he had with Alexander Campbell during his final earthly sojourn. Alexander expressed sorrow at the separation of his reform movement and the Baptist: "There was never any sufficient reason," said he, "for a separation between us and the Baptists. We ought to have remained one people, and to have labored together to restore the primitive faith and practice." See also Ibid., 518—519, the following comments of Alexander:

> We have one faith, one Lord, one baptism, but various opinions. These, when left to vegetate without annoyance, if erroneous, wither and die. We find much philosophy in one of Paul's precepts, somewhat mistranslated: 'Receive one another without regard to difference of opinion.' We indeed receive in our communion persons of other denominations who will take upon them the responsibility of their participating with us. We do indeed in our affections and in our practice receive all Christians, all who give evidence of their faith in the Messiah, and of their attachment to his person character and will."

[11] For an excellent treatment of the distinction between reformation and restoration, see Leroy Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement* (Missouri: College Press, 1981), 1—23.

[12] Barton Warren Stone, *Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone* (Cincinnati: J.A. & U.P. James, 1874), 61.

[13] See Richardson, *Memoirs,* 1: 391—396.

[14] Ibid., 395.

[15] See Ibid., 398, where he records the events leading up to Campbell's baptism:

> Alexander had stipulated with Elder Luce that the ceremony should be performed precisely according to the pattern given in the New Testament, and that, as there was no account of any of the first converts being called upon to give what is called a "religious experience," this modern custom should be omitted, and that the candidates should be

admitted on the simple confession that "Jesus is the Son of God.

[16] Ibid., 397—398.

[17] Alexander Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-immersion," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 7 (July 2, 1832): 319 (emphasis mine—RDB).

[18] Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 177.

[19] See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 288, where he writes:

> Mr. Campbell greatly disapproved the practice of making such issues, and of using such strong and unguarded expressions as the "power of remitting sins" and "washing away sins in baptism." "These," said he, "have been most prejudicial to the cause of truth, and have given a pretext to the opposition for their hard speeches against the pleadings of Reformers." The habitual use of such expressions he thought also calculated to lead men to overlook or disparage that faith in the sacrifice of Christ from which alone baptism derived its efficacy. On this account, in baptizing persons, he used only the simple formula, "Into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and forebore adding to it, like Mr. Scott and others, the expression "for the remission of sins." "When any doctrine," said he (Mill. Harb. For 1832, p. 299), "is professed and taught by many, when any matter gets into many hands, some will misuse, abuse and pervert it. This is unavoidable. We have always feared abuses and extremes."

[20] See Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:212—216.

[21] Alexander Campbell, Extra, "Remission of Sins," *Millennial Harbinger* I, (July 5, 1830): 50.

[22] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:207.

[23] Ibid., 84. When he began preaching this doctrine, he was still associated with the Mahoning Baptist Association.

[24] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2: 84.

[25] Ibid., 2: 212-214.

[26] Alexander Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-Immersion," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (March 5, 1932): 119.

[27] For an examination of blessings bestowed upon the recipient of baptism, see Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-Immersion," Ibid., 118—123, where he writes:

> A.—And I have sundry things to say which I deem of much importance on this subject, not yet said. One thing I wish you to reflect upon till next we meet, a proposition of such meaning. It is this—*baptism cannot be repeated unless in its full sense.* No person can constitutionally be immersed for remission alone—for the Holy Spirit alone—for coming into the kingdom alone. He must be baptized into Christ, in the whole and full sense of the institution, or not at all. Whether you may think it makes for you or for me, I request you to examine it as an independent proposition.

> In concluding let me remind you of the danger of running into extremes and eccentricities. The sanguine are liable to take detached and isolated views of favorite topics. Let us regard the whole truth in all its connexions, and give to each its proper importance. A sound understanding will always be on its guard against one-sided views of cardinal truths. Let us not be bewitched by the glare of novelty, by the brilliancy of new discoveries, nor obstinately and superstitiously attached to old opinions (p. 123).

[28] Richardson, *Memoirs*, 2:288.

[29] See Lipscomb, "*Rebaptism Reviewed*," *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 792-793.

[30] David Lipscomb, "Rebaptism Reviewed," *Gospel Advocate* (December 12, 1907): 792-793; cited in Jimmy Allen, *Re-baptism? What One Must Know To Be Born Again* (Louisiana: Howard Publishing, 1991), 99-108. This author took the liberty of breaking up Lipscomb's long paragraphs into shorter paragraphs for ease of reading.

[31] See Allen, *Re-baptism*, 108-126.

[32] Ibid., 131-138.

[33] This series of dialogues on reimmersion occurred seventy-five years earlier than Lipscomb's article ("Rebaptism Reviewed") cited above.

[34] Alexander Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-Immersion," *Millennial Harbinger* 3, no. 3 (March 5, 1832), 119-121. See also Campbell, "Dialogue," *Millennial* 3, no 5 (May 2, 1832): 220-224; Ibid., no. 6 (June 7, 1832): 262-264; Ibid., no.7 (July 2, 1832): 316-321.

[35] *Religious Herald*, "Sneers of the Enemy," quoted in the *Millennial Harbinger,* 7, no. 5 (May 1836): 231.

[36] Alexander Campbell, "Extra, No. 1—New Series," *Millennial Harbinger* 1 , (December 1837): 587.

[37] Campbell's father also manifested this same attitude of brotherness among the various denominations. For examples of this mind-set, see Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* where he spoke of "brethren of all denominations," in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1985, reprint), 91. Also, in the "Appendix" of the *Declaration and Address*, Campbell speaks of other believers as "churches of Christ" as well as brothers and Christians. Consider the following terms of endearment: "our brother," Christian brethren," "our fellow-Christians," "acknowledged brother," "acknowledge each other as Christians," "to our brethren," "acknowledge each other as brethren, and love as children of the same father," and "our dear brethren." See also Leroy Garrett, "Baptists As Brothers," *Restoration Review* 16, no. 3 (March 1974): 253—254.

[38] For a brief overview of this rebaptism controversy, see Leroy Garrett, "Restoration and Baptism," *Restoration Review* 13, no. 10 (December 1971): 145—150. Also consult Earl Ervin West, *The Life and Times of David Lipscomb* (Henderson, TN: Religious Book Service, 1954), 225. See also Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 251-262.

[39] Eckstein, *Churches of Christ,* 251.

[40] For a discussion of the *Firm Foundation*, see Earl Irvin West, *The Search for the Ancient Order: A History of the Restoration Movement 1849-1906* (Indiana: Religious book Service, 1950, 2:405-408. See also Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 251, 255.

[41] See Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 252, where he says,

> The crux of the issue centered primarily around the Baptists and immersed Methodists and Presbyterians, who sought membership in the church of Christ on the basis of their first immersion. Before McGary raised the issue, churches of Christ generally had accepted all immersed believers into their membership without requiring rebaptism although there may have been a fundamental difference of opinion regarding the purpose of baptism.

[42] Lipscomb and Swell, *questions Answered* (Tennessee: McQuiddy Printing, 1921; reprint, (Tennessee: Gospel Advocate, 1974), 66 (page references are to reprint edition).

[43] Ibid., 36.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 65.

[46] Ibid., 65-67.

[47] See Eckstein, *Churches of Christ*, 257.

[48] For a more detailed review of this controversy, see Ibid., 251-262.

[49] Ibid., 257.

[50] Ibid., 259.

[51] Ibid., 258.

[52] James R. Wilburn, *The Hazard of the Die: Tolbert Fanning and the Restoration Movement* (Texas: Sweet Publishing, 1969), 70.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., cited from both the *Gospel Advocate* I (May 1855): 154, and from the *Christian Review* 2 (September 1845): 197.

[55] Ibid., 69.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Lloyd Cline Sears, *The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James Alexander Harding* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970), 146.

[58] Ibid., 178.

[59] Lipscomb and Sewell, *Questions Answered* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), 49.

[60] Ibid., 49-50. The above citation as appears as one paragraph in the original source, but I (Dallas Burdette) have taken the privilege of creating a number of paragraphs for ease of reading.

[61] Out of this Reformation Movement evolved three distinct fellowships: (1) Churches of Christ, (2) Christian Churches, and (3) Disciples of Christ. Then, from these three separate fellowships, there are many subdivisions within each group—each distinctive party claiming to be the "one true church."

[62] The Anabaptist did not recognize other believers as Christians. They believed that the church needed to be restored, not reformed. This attitude is similar to some Churches of Christ. See C. Leonard and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988) for a thorough analysis of the distinction between a Reformation Movement and a Restoration Movement. Again, as mentioned above, it would be helpful for one to consult Garrett, *Stone-Campbell Movement*, 1—23 for a brief overview of the dissimilarity between the two concepts.

[63] For a Brief overview of the impact of these men, see Leonard and Hughes, *Ancestry*, 21-34.

[64] Campbell, "Dialogue on Re-immersion," *Millennial Harbinger 3*, no.5 (May 2, 1832): 222.

[65] The word *context*, as the etymology intimates, means the connection of thought supposed to run through every passage that constitutes by itself a whole. In analyzing context, one discovers that there is the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1886, reprint, nd), 210 for an excellent treatment on context.

[66] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[67] Obviously, there are other reasons for individuals to be reimmersed. For instance, if a person is lacking in either faith or repentance at the time of baptism, then this lack of faith or repentance would make null and void the act of baptism. Again, if one is baptized to follow the crowd or if one is baptized in order to receive a handout from the church, then one's baptism is invalid. If a person is baptized in order to satisfy a nagging husband or wife, then that person's baptism is unacceptable. If one is baptized to accomplish some unworthy purpose, then that individual's baptism is worthless. One must act on the right motive—an aim to obey God. If one's objective is to obey God, then when one is baptized "into the name of the Lord Jesus," then that person can rest upon the assurance that his/her baptism is acceptable to Almighty God.

[68] Alexander Campbell, "Re-immersion and Brother Thomas," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 2 (February 1836): 63.

[69] Ananias expresses the same truth in exhortation to Paul concerning his response to the Lord: "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (**Acts 22:16**).

[70] "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory " (**Ephesians 1:13-14**).

[71] "He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned'" (**Mark 16:15-16**).

[72] "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (**Colossians 2:11-12**).

[73] J. M. Powell, *The Cause We Plead: A Story of the Restoration Movement* (Nashville: 20th Century Christian, 1987), 178.

[74] Jimmy Allen, *Re-Baptism?* 191-192. See also Allen's section on "Response to Objections and Question," 139-216. Another informative essay is his "Into What Were You Baptized," 217-245.

[75] Richardson, *Memoirs*, vol., 2, 288.

[76] See Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 155, where he says,

> **Sitz im Leben.** A German phrase meaning "setting in life," that is, the particular life setting in which a teaching was given or formulated. In form and redaction criticism, *Sitz im Leben* may be the situation in which Jesus gave a teaching, the situation of the church as it preserved and expressed the teaching, or the situation to which the Gospel writer was addressing the final form of the teaching.

[77] Ibid., 53, where he writes: "**Exegesis.** The obtaining of the meaning of a passage by drawing the meaning out from rather than reading it into the text."

Thrust Statement: The way to Bethlehem's manger is through John the Baptist.

Scripture Reading: Luke 3:1-18 [1].

This is the season of Advent; Advent is associated with the birth of Christ and His entrance into the world in the Incarnation. Generally, this celebration occurs over a four-week period - beginning December 1. Christmas is a time of joy. It is a time that the world as a whole remembers the coming of God in flesh. It is a time in which many people reflect upon the salvation offered to humanity through the atonement of Jesus on the cross of Calvary. It is a time in which people recall the words of Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus.

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:16-18).

It is a time in which people recollect Luke's narrative about the birth of Jesus and the angels praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men on whom his
favor rests"; (Luke 2:14).

ON THE WAY TO BETHLEHEM'S MANGER

In Luke's account of the birth of Jesus, one must first travel the scenic route of John the Baptist. Luke narrates the events leading up to the Bethlehem manger (Luke 1:1-3:1-18). Christians do not often include John the Baptist in their Christmas celebrations. And, perhaps, his absence from the Christmas story is not accidental. John is a very upsetting figure; nevertheless, in defiance of his looks, one encounters John in the Judean wilderness preparing the way of the Messiah (Luke 3:3; Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:4). In the wilderness, one sees John "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4).

Following this forceful proclamation of repentance by John, Mathew adds a vivid portrait about his dress and food: "John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4). John is clothed with camel's hair and he sweats under the desert sun. His beard and hair are streaked with dust, his feet and sandals covered with dirt. He reeks of destitution and of excitement and of stern chastisement. John's exterior appears to be out of place with the shepherds, angels, peace, and good will toward men (Luke 2:8-14). But, in spite of his exhibition of dress, his mission is to prepare the way of the Lord (Mark 1:2-3). Luke also gives additional information about John's ministry that is beyond his physical appearance:

> He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:14-17).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke have the story of John at the beginning of their Gospels. Before they tell the full story of Jesus, they begin with the Baptist. Thus, as we, too, explore our way to Bethlehem's manger, we begin with John in order that we may know how to accept the child wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger (Luke 2:7). When one admits John onto the Advent stage, there is something that is inflexible about his sharp call to repentance. Luke sounds the stage for John's messianic mission:

As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the desert,
`Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.
Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.
The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.
And all mankind will see God's salvation' (Luke 3:4-6).

When John appears, the "Kingdom of God is near" (Matthew 3:2). It is not doing Christmas shopping, sending Christmas cards, preparing Christmas dinners, wrapping Christmas presents, or participating in Christmas plays. No, Christmas is not about these things, but, rather, it is about eternity. John is on the scene, "the Kingdom of God is near." In the words of Paul: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

John came in order to prepare a people for the Lord. He prepares the people for the glory of the Lord, for visions of everlasting peace, for a new and eternal covenant, for living water, and for baptism with the Holy Spirit. Mark gives the substance of John's message:

> After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am

> not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:7-8).

John, conscious of the coming One, shouts that "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). Every decision that one makes, every act that one does, will be decisive for eternity - "every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." With the Baptist on the scene, it cannot be Christmas as usual. John is on the stage saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." (Mathew 3:2). Repent is the cry of John. With John's announcement about the coming of God's kingdom, people respond from the various regions to hear John. They need salvation. Matthew informs us that "People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River" (Matthew 3:5-6).

There is great excitement is in the air. The people look for the promised Messiah. Some think perhaps that John is the Christ:

> **The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ.** John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." **And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them** (Luke 3:15-18).

The people were living in great darkness. They needed light. Their lives, even as ours, were full of hurt, full of pain, full of despair; they were constantly living in the shadow of death. Thus, they were eager to hear the good news announced by John - forgiveness of sins. As a result of John's efforts in preaching that the "Kingdom of God is near," then, " all mankind will see God's salvation" (Luke 3:6). People flocked to hear this prophet of God. Upon their arrival, John explains that repentance is the way of receiving the Lord's salvation; repentance is preparation for the coming of Jesus. This news came as a shock to the Pharisees. They were not prepared to hear that God loves the humble, the meek, the poor in spirit, and the confessing sinner. John forcefully set forth that repentance is not simply a feeling, but rather, it is a transformation of one's actions; repentance is a change of how one lives. Every one was told to "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Luke 3:7).

For John, confession bears fruit in hearts transformed and in lives changed from the inside out. One's piety is not enough. "I repent" means to bring forth justice, to help bring about social change for the downtrodden, to eliminate grudges, to heal rupture between you and your spouse, to bring about reconciliation between you and your parents, and to bring about make-up between parent and child, and the end of animosities between Christians. The crowds ask John what repentance means. He responds by saying:

> The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same. Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. Then some soldiers asked him, And what should we do? He

> replied, Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely-be content with your pay (Luke 3:11-14).

John demands that we live lives of righteousness, justice, and truth. Can you do this? Yes, but not in perfection. Are you perfect? Do you want to escape darkness and be delivered to light? Do you wish to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's dear Son? If so, you cannot rely upon your own righteousness. John preaches the good news to those in darkness. For John, God provides a way of salvation through the Lamb of God. John denies being the Christ, the one who brings forgiveness of sins. John, the apostle, also gives us the Baptist's own testimony:

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely,
"I am not the Christ."
They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said,
"I am not."
"Are you the Prophet?"
He answered, "No."
Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"
John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, `Make straight the way for the Lord'" (John 1:19-23).

Following John's announcement of his purpose, one finds him, on the next day, as he sees Jesus coming, exclaiming:

> "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, `A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel" (John 1:29-31).

What does John require for receiving the Lord? Repentance and bearing fruit, says John. Not only did John begin his ministry with repentance, but it is significant that Jesus also began His ministry by calling upon people to "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). Matthew also informs us that Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23). John also went about "preaching the good news of the kingdom" (Luke 3:18). What is the "good news"? It is, Jesus is God's way of salvation. Jesus offers salvation through faith in Him, not works. Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Have you crossed over from death to life? Have you accepted Jesus as your atonement for your sins? Have you accepted Jesus as your mercy seat? Now is the time to reflect upon your salvation.

This is the season of Advent. This is a time of reflection upon the shepherds, angels, and the Bethlehem manger. Do you remember the words that the angel spoke to Mary, the mother of Jesus? The angel says, "you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Are you listening to the good news about salvation? Are you going to allow your sins and your unrighteousness to bar you from the manger. Do you

believe? Salvation is only "in and through" Jesus (Romans 5:21). It is only "in and through" Jesus that one can be delivered from God's wrath (Romans 5:1-21). It is only "in and through" Jesus that one can be delivered from the power of sin (Romans 6:1-23). It is only "in and through" Jesus that one can be delivered from the curse of the law (Romans 7:1-25). It is only "in and through" Jesus that can be delivered from condemnation (Romans 8:1-39).

Christmas is a time of meditation on the incarnation; it is a time of examination of your life; it is a time of contemplation about your relationship with God. Remember that you can only approach God "in and through" Jesus. He says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

As you consider this Advent season, don't forget that as one thinks about the incarnation, one passes through John on the way to Bethlehem's manger. John pointed to Jesus and declared, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, `A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me'" (John 1:29-30).

Preached: Grassy Church of Christ (Grassy, Alabama), November 30, 1997, 11 am Service.

ENDNOTES

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from the NIV.

What Do You Think About the Christ?

PART I

Dallas Burdette December 6, 1997

Thrust statement: Jesus is God's Anointed One.

Scripture reading: Matthew **22:42**

What do you think about the Christ? There is no one here today who has not asked themselves that question. For almost two thousand years, men and women have searched for an answer to that dispute. In examining this controversy, one is confronted with various responses down through the centuries. Why is this question so important? One's eternal destiny depends upon a proper response to this discussion. Is he God or man? Did He preexist before becoming man? Is he eternal? These are questions that one must solve in seeking a solution to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42).

Do you believe the words of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." (John 1:1-2). Was He really the Son of God? Did He leave heaven and come down to this world for a purpose? Did He come to seek and save the lost? A proper answer to these questions should assist one in making the correct reply to the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42).

The Bethlehem Manger

To begin this quest for answers to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees, let us start with Luke's Gospel. Luke narrates some political history leading up to the birth of Jesus. He informs us that Caesar Augustus had issued a decree for a census of the Roman world and that Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2). He also fills in additional information about the events leading up to God becoming flesh. He writes that

> Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to

> him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:4-7).

Matthew writes about the miraculous conception of Mary through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18). In order to verify the truthfulness of this assertion, he cites a prophecy of Isaiah (7:14) concerning the virgin birth of our Lord, a prediction made seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, not in a palace, but in a manger. He left the grandeur of heaven for a crown of thorns; He left the glory of heaven for a shameful death on a tree. Paul, approximately twenty-five years after the crucifixion, captures in poetic language the sacrifice of the one who became flesh.

> Who, being in very nature God,
> did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
> but made himself nothing,
> taking the very nature of a servant,
> being made in human likeness.
> And being found in appearance as a man,
> he humbled himself
> and became obedient to death—
> even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).

Christ as Teacher

Again, one is still confronted with Jesus' question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). What do you think about the Christ as a teacher? Listen to how the people reacted that heard His Sermon on the Mount: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Matthew 7:28-29). After the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Matthew 4:12), Jesus returned to Galilee and began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). While in Galilee, following the selecting of His disciples, Matthew again informs his readers that "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matthew 4:23).

Immediately upon calling attention to His teaching throughout Galilee, Matthew gives an example of His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). You know the Sermon, do you not? One cannot read this Sermon without standing in awe, as did the people who heard Him. Are you now reflecting upon His many parables? One of His most memorable parables, the Prodigal Son, is still repeated to illustrate God's forgiveness.

Christ as Physician

Immediately following His Sermon on the Mount, Matthew gives evidence to substantiate not only His authority to teach, but to heal as the Great Physician. Upon coming down from the mountain, following His Sermon, Jesus is met by a man plagued with leprosy. This man approached Jesus and knelt before him and requested healing. To this Jesus responded by reaching "out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!' Immediately he was cured of his leprosy" (Matthew 8:3). Again, Matthew reports the faith of the centurion in his request to Jesus to heal his paralytic servant. Jesus said, "I will go and heal him." (8:7), and the paralyzed servant was healed at that very hour (8:13).

One could multiply the miraculous healings of Jesus, but His answer to John the Baptist, who inquired of Him as to whether or not He is the One expected, or should they look for another, is quite revealing as to the nature of His mission.

> Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me" (Matthew 11:5-6).

But these points are not the particular circumstances that I wish to stress in pursuing an answer to the question asked by Jesus: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). In seeking to find out what we think about the Christ, first, let us go to His enemies to find their reactions, and, second to His friends to uncover their impressions.

The Pharisees

First, among the witnesses, let us call upon the Pharisees. Just a perusal of the book of Matthew reveals how much they hated Him. What did they have against Him? Just what did the Pharisees "think about the Christ"? Matthew summarizes an event that took place while Jesus was having dinner with him in his home. He says,

> Many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:10-13).

Luke also reports the accusation of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in their tongue-lashing of Him. What was their criticism? "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

For the Christian this information is gladly received news. This is what causes us to praise God, not something that brings about rejection of Jesus. Jesus came to extend mercy and compassion and kindness and forgiveness to the sinner. This mercy is at the very heart of the Gospel. This is the Good News to a lost and dying world. The Gospel is for the downtrodden, the downcast, the dejected, the discouraged, the shattered, the broken hearted, the sad, and the crushed. "It is not the healthy," said Jesus, "who need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12). This is one of the greatest compliments that one could ascribe to Jesus.

Matthew gives us another insight about the resentful spirit of the religious leaders while Jesus was hanging upon a tree. But in this perception, he discloses a truth that the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders announce.

> "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (Matthew 27:42-44).

"He saved others." And He did! He voluntarily laid down His life for us. In fact, John records this particular saying of Jesus in His discourse about the Shepherd and His Flock.

> The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:17-18).

What the religious leaders were saying is quite true, "He saved others." Mark cites the forcefulness of this truth as he relates the events leading up to Jesus' startling statement as found in His response to the request of James and John for positions of honor in His kingdom. Mark writes,

> When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:41-45).

Jesus was a ransom for many. He died for others. The Pharisees were quite correct in their assessment of what He accomplished – "He saved others." Every person must answer for themselves the question asked by Jesus: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). Why not allow the Christ to save you from God's wrath, from the dominion of sin, from the curse of the law, and from condemnation? The writer of Hebrews encapsulates the very essence of redemption in his discussion of the efficacy of the blood of Christ, when he says,

> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:14-15).

Why delay your salvation? Why not come today? John, the apostle, exclaims, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

PREACHED

Grassy Church of Christ (Arab, Alabama), December 7, 1997, 11 a.m. Service

What Do You Think About the Christ?

Part 2 of 3

Dallas Burdette December 21, 1997

Thrust statement: He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Scripture reading: Matthew 22:42

What do you think about the Christ? There is no one here today who has not asked themselves that question. For almost two thousand years, men and women have searched for an answer to that controversy. In examining this controversy, one is confronted with various responses down through the centuries. Why is this question so important? One's eternal destiny depends upon a proper response to this discussion. Is he god or man? Did he preexist before becoming man? Is he eternal? These are questions that one must solve in seeking a solution to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42).[1]

In the previous message (part 1), we observed, as reported in the gospel of Luke, certain political events that surrounded the Bethlehem manger. Also, we briefly viewed Matthew's account of Jesus as teacher. Following these two explorations about Jesus, we then inspected Jesus as physician. Everyone must continue his or her quest for an answer to that penetrating question asked by Jesus.

In our search for an appropriate answer, let us go to those who knew him to determine their response to the famous question. Let us travel to those who knew him and ask what they thought about him. If you want to find out about a man, then, inquire from those who knew him best. In the last message, we explored what the Pharisees thought about him; you remember their response: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

Well, today, I want to continue to follow this line of reasoning – What others thought about him. In this particular quest, one wishes to be non-partisan in order to arrive at an in-depth perception that is not narrow-minded. This neutrality demands that one go to the enemies as well as to his friends. Why? If one were to go only to those who liked him, one might answer that he or she is blind. Again, one might accuse the believer of one-sidedness by saying, "You cannot get anything good out of him, unless it be in his favor. It is a one-sided affair." So we shall not rely totally upon those who liked him, but we shall also push on to his enemies, to those who hated him, persecuted him, cursed him, and slew him. In the first part of this message, we addressed the Pharisees' evaluation of him and discovered their remarks quite revealing as to their perception of Jesus' character.

To keep up this investigation, I want to reflect on Martha (sister of Mary), a dear friend of Jesus to determine her perception of his miraculous powers – even to raise the dead; and, also to reflect upon a member of the ruling council in Jerusalem to ascertain additional remarks about his reaction to the miraculous abilities of Jesus. In addition to these two witnesses, we shall also call upon other witnesses. We will summon, for example, Caiaphas (chief priest when Christ was crucified), Pilate (governor of Judea), Judas (one of his disciples who betrayed him), the centurion (present at the crucifixion), the thief (one to whom Jesus addressed), John the Baptist (relative and forerunner of Jesus), Peter (a disciple), John (the beloved disciple), Thomas (the one who doubted the resurrection), Saul (one who persecuted the faith and later became a disciple of Jesus), angels of God, redeemed saints, and, finally, the testimony of God Himself.

What Others Thought About Him

First, let us go to the home of Martha and Mary, friends of his, in Bethany. To set the stage for Martha's remarks about Jesus, let us approach John's narrative about the death of Lazarus, the brother of these two sisters. John begins by saying,

> On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again**."** Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:17-27).

First of all, Martha knew that if Jesus had been there, Lazarus would not have died. When Jesus said that he would rise again, Martha responded by saying that he would rise in the resurrection at the last day. During the course of the conversation she confesses that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27). Ultimately, Jesus called Lazarus from the grave (John 11:43), once more demonstrating his messianic authority. This miracle only confirms what Martha confessed -- He is "the Christ, the Son of God." One cannot help but wonder if Martha had previously heard that soul-searching question that Jesus asked the Pharisees. What does Martha believe about the Christ. She says that he is the "Son of God." How do you answer this question? Do you believe who he is "the Christ, the Son of God"?

Let us now call upon another witness that talked with Jesus to get his perception. To do this, let us enter the night scene of a Pharisee in Jerusalem as he approaches him. This witness, a member of the ruling council, came to Jesus by night in a solitary meeting with Jesus. During this meeting, this man's confession about the miraculous powers of Jesus is quite revealing. Just who is this man? It is Nicodemus; you remember the story of Nicodemus, don't you? What is so significant about his remarks to Jesus?

Listen to John as he relates the personal meeting, "He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him'" (John 11:27). Did you observe the words "we know." This knowledge about

Jesus' miraculous power was not a secret. The ruling council knew that for one with such miraculous powers, he had come from God. We have no record that Jesus asked him the specific question that he asked the Pharisees, unless he was present when Jesus asked the Pharisees in general. Nevertheless, he knew that Jesus was different from other men – He came from God.

Nicodemus's words are worth citing again in order to give emphasis to how Nicodemus reacted to Jesus in his nightly rendezvous with the master -- "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him" (John 11:27). He knew that there was something special about Jesus, something that was not true with other men. There was no denying the miraculous signs. As you read about the miracles in the Gospels, how do you answer the question?

Let us call upon another witness who participated in his trial, namely, Caiaphas; this man was his enemy.[2] John details the events leading up to Jesus' encounter with this archenemy. Before examining the testimony of Caiaphas, let us turn to the preceding events leading up to this interview. John informs us that

> the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people (John 18:12-14).

Then, John graphically narrates the dialogue between Jesus and the high priest Annas.

> Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. "I have spoken openly to the world," Jesus replied. "I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said." When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest (John 18:19-24).

Matthew is the one who details the conversation between Caiaphas and Jesus. Following the accusations against Jesus, accusations that were false, the high priest Caiaphas said to Jesus: "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:63)." Jesus responds by saying, "'Yes, it is as you say,'" . . . . 'But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matthew 26:64).

Do you remember the question that Jesus had earlier asked the Pharisees? "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). In the trial before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas asked Jesus to tell them (1) if he was the Christ and (2) if he was the Son of God. Jesus answered by saying, "Yes, it is as you say." It is at this point that Caiaphas exclaimed: "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy" (Matthew 26:65). He was so enraged at Jesus that "he tore his clothes" (26:65). What did they have against Jesus? Only this, he claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God.

Let us briefly call attention to one more witness today. The eyewitness we call upon to enter the witness box is none other than Pilate. Since Pilate interrogated Jesus and talked with him face to face, then,

Pilate makes an excellent witness. Matthew informs us that after the Sanhedrin's trial, they decided to turn him over to Pilate. He writes: "Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor" (Matthew 27:1). What was Pilate's reaction to Jesus after examination? Listen to Luke's account of Pilate's remarks to the chief priests and rulers of the people.

> Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him" (Luke 23:13-17).

Pilate found no basis for their charges, and he also asserts that Herod himself did not find any basis for charges to be laid against Jesus. Such is the testimony of the men who examined him. And, as Jesus stands there in the midst of this mob, suddenly, a man elbows his way toward Pilate, while he was sitting on the judge's seat, and hands him a note from his wife. The note reads: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Matthew 27:19).

In closing this message for today, I ask you the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). I plead with you today to accept Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Why delay your salvation? Why not come today? Remember the words of John the revelator: "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

PREACHED

Grassy Church of Christ (Arab, Alabama)
December 21, 1997
11 a.m. Service

ENDNOTES

[1] Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture citations are from the NIV.

[2] The name Caiaphas appears eight times in eight verses in the New Testament: Matthew 26:3, 57; Luke 3:2; John 11:49; 18:13, 14, 24, 28.

What Do You Think About the Christ?

Part 3 of 3

Dallas Burdette December 28, 1997

Thrust statement: He is the Christ, the Son of God.

Scripture reading: Matthew 22:42

What do you think about the Christ? There is no one here today who has not asked themselves that question. For almost two thousand years, men and women have searched for an answer to that controversy. In examining this controversy, one is confronted with various responses down through the centuries. Why is this question so important? One's eternal destiny depends upon a proper response to this discussion. Is he god or man? Did he preexist before becoming man? Is he eternal? These are questions that one must solve in seeking a solution to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (**Matthew 22:42**).[1]

In previous messages, we observed the events leading up to the Bethlehem manger, Christ as teacher and physician, the Pharisees perception of Jesus, Martha's faith in Him, Nicodemus' rendezvous with the master, and the testimony of Caiaphas and Pilate. Today, we want to focus on several testimonies: the centurion's confession (**Matthew 27:34**), the penitent thief on the cross (**Luke 23:41**), John the Baptist's acknowledgment of Him as the Lamb of God (**John 1:29**), Peter's confession that He is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), John's statement that He was "in the beginning," (**John 1:1**), Thomas's bold statement about Jesus being his Lord and God (**John 20:28**), Paul's gratitude to Christ (**Philippians 3:7-11**), angels singing about the birth of the savior (**Luke 2:9-14**), the host of heaven and earth praising God about the Lamb (Revelation 5:11-14), and, finally, God's testimony concerning His Son (**Matthew 3:17**). This list is indeed quite an array of witnesses to call upon.

The Centurion. There are a number of centurions mentioned in the New Testament, but today we are concerned about one of those centurions -- the one that witnessed the crucifixion. This centurion heard Jesus cry in a loud voice and saw him die. The moment of Jesus' death, according to Matthew, the earth shook, the rocks split, tombs broke open, and the bodies of many were raised to life. Matthew captures the excitement and confession of one of the centurions that witnessed all of this, he writes: "the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (**Matthew 27:54**). Do you believe this testimony from one who was an eyewitness of the many miraculous events that occurred that day as a result of Christ's crucifixion, from one who knew that this One surely was the Son of God. Yes he

heard Jesus cry out about the sixth hour: *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Mark 15:34**). Is it any wonder that the centurion believed?

The thief on the Cross. Since there were two thieves on the cross, I want to zero in on the conversation of one particular one. What did one of the thieves on the cross think of Him? Matthew gives an interesting comment about the two robbers crucified with Him. But before Matthew makes a comment about the robbers, he tells us that the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders moked Him. Then Matthew adds, "In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him" (**Matthew 27:44**). Undoubtedly, one of the criminals had a change of heart, because Luke informs us that

> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (**Luke 23:39-41**).

This criminal knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong; he requested that Jesus remember him when He comes into His kingdom. Do you want Jesus to remember you? The kingdom of God is here today. Are you a part of this kingdom? I ask you to search your heart and make a decision for Christ today.

John the Baptist. Let us hear from another witness -- the wilderness preacher. This man was so powerful in his presentation that he drew all Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan into the wilderness to hear him (**Matthew 3:5**). He burst upon the nation of Israel like a flash of a meteor. What did John think about Jesus? Hear his testimony after he baptized a number of penitent individuals. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29**). That was John's testimony concerning who Jesus is. Again, John the apostle cites another incident in which John the Baptist gives further testimony.

> "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (**John 1:32-34**).

Peter. Peter was one of the twelve disciples. He witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus on the mount; and, in spite of this revelation, he later denied him at his trial. But after the resurrection of Jesus, we find Peter, fifty days after the resurrection event, proclaiming: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (**Acts 2:36**). How did the people respond to his message? Luke tells us that following Peter's declaration about the Christ that "they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (**Acts 2:37**). Are you "cut to the heart" over your rejection of the Christ? Are you "cut to the heart" over your sins? If so, why not repent and be immersed for the forgiveness of your sins as 3000 did on that day?

John the Beloved Disciple. John takes up his pen and with one stroke, as it were, goes back into time, even before Adam and Eve. He writes:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men (**John 1:1-**

4).

Again, John give his eyewitness testimony concerning this One that "was with God in the beginning."

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete (**1 John 1:1-4**).

Thomas the Doubter. Thomas also was one of His twelve disciples. In spite of his travels with Jesus, he, nevertheless, found it difficult to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. He said that he would not believe, unless he could put his fingers into the wound in his side. This event was so significant that John recorded his unbelief and confession. John says,

> Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (**John 20:24-25**).

Did Thomas change his mind? Well, let's hear the rest of the story. John, as he relates this episode, captures the scene in very graphic detail as he describes Thomas' encounter with Jesus a week later.

> A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (**John 20:26-29**).

Do you believe? Thomas did! He confessed Jesus as "My Lord and my God!"

Saul the Persecutor. Saul the persecutor later became Paul the apostle. You remember the story of Paul on the Damascus Road, don't you? In his encounter with the Christ, he cried out, "Who are you, Lord?" (**Acts 9:5**). Jesus responded by saying, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," (**Acts 9:5**). What a change that one interview made with Paul. A few years later we hear him saying,

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:7-11**).

How do you feel about the Christ? Do you consider the things of the world as rubbish in order that you

might gain the Christ?

The Angels of God. Let us summons the heavenly host for their testimony. They saw Him in the bosom of the Father before the world was. They saw Him before the dawn of creation. They saw Him before the morning stars sang together. They saw him leave the throne and come down to the manager. What a scene that must have been for them to witness. Listen, as the silence of heaven is broken to the shepherds living out in the fields:

> An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests"** (**Luke 2:9-14**).

The Host of Heaven and Earth. Many on earth rejected him, even though many confessed him. But in heaven where he had been from the foundation of the world, we find a different picture. Listen in on the praise of the angels, the living creatures, the elder, and all creatures:

> the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped (**Revelation 5:11-14**).

God the Father. The last witness we call upon today is none other than God Himself. Following the baptism of Jesus, God speaks, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**). Again, on the Mount of Transfiguration, God tells Peter, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (**Matthew 17:5**). That voice is still echoing, "listen to him," "listen to him"! Will you not listen to the voice of the Son of God? He pleads with everyone to turn from their sinful way of life and find comfort and healing in Him.

Conclusion

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

Preached:

Grassy Church of Christ (Arab, Alabama)
12-28-97
11 a.m.

ENDNOTES

[1] Unless noted otherwise, all Scripture citations are from the NIV.

A Witnessing Community

Thrust Statement: **The Church is to witness to God's redemptive act in Christ Jesus.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 28:18-20; John 4:39; Acts 8:14**

As one reflects upon the Great Commission, one cannot help but think about the importance of witnessing to the world at large, the magnitude of ethical behavior in one's outreach to the lost, and the place of baptism in this scheme of redemption from heaven. This paper will develop this subject of the witnessing community from these three perspectives. The company of the Resurrection needs to recapture the Great Commission as first and foremost in its agenda to reach the lost. Jesus' words to His disciples concerning the Great Commission receive little attention from many within the company of the redeemed.

The modern Church is composed of a silent people. Yet, many Christians emphasize Christian baptism in isolation from its whole context—"go and make disciples of all nations" (**Matthew 28:19**). It appears, so it seems to this author, that witnessing is secondary in the lives of many Christians. When one becomes a part of the company of Resurrection, this person becomes a member of the Christian community that is a witnessing Christianity. Just a casual glance at the Book of Acts reveals the witnessing community as a community that proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus wherever they traveled.

THE WITNESSING COMMUNITY

Christians must recapture the seriousness of the Macedonian Call, so to speak, to evangelize the world. Christians should be ready to proclaim Jesus as the Way to God. The Church of Jesus is always a missionary Church, at least it should be; it must be a Church with an outreach ministry—local and abroad. Is there a desire on your part to win others to Christ? Do you want others to be the same as yourself in your belief that Jesus is the Anointed One of God for the salvation of humanity? Are you willing to proclaim the Christian worldview? Are you willing to undergo hardness and discipline in your Christian walk? Are you zealous for the things of God? Do you feel constrained to live and even to

die for Jesus?

Are you a missionary? The Church of Jesus is always a missionary church. One of the greatest missionaries in the early chuch was Paul. He put God first in all his thinking and actions. Even when he stood before King Agrippa, he sought to reach out to Agrippa and Festus (**Acts 26**). During Paul's defense for His faith in Jesus, Festus interrupted his speech and accused Paul of being out of his mind (**26:24**). After this interruption, Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" [1] Paul's reply to Agrippa is outstanding: "I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains" (**26:29**). One cannot read these words of Paul without a consciousness that Paul was a man of conviction. Are you a person of conviction? This speech of Paul is a speech of a man who is a man who has strong beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth. Are you, too, a crusader for the Gospel of Jesus?

Andrew's Example of Evangelism

As a crusader, one must tell the Good News to individuals that he or she makes contact with. What about relatives? What about close friends? John the apostle relates the ministry of John the Baptist along with his testimony about Jesus as "the Lamb of God" (**John 1: 35**). One of the men who heard John's testimony about Jesus followed Jesus. Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew was so excited concerning Jesus that he went and found his brother Peter in order to tell him about the Messiah and to bring him to Jesus (**1:36-42**). Listen to John as he relates this incidence:

> Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. [2] Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. 41 The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). 42 And he brought him to Jesus. (**1:40-42**).

Are you like Andrew? Is there an excitement in your life to tell others about Jesus and bring them to Him? If one is under deep conviction about Jesus as the Savior of the world, one cannot help but lead people to Jesus.

Philip's Example of Evangelism

The day after Andrew witnessed to his brother Peter, Jesus found Philip (**1:43**). Philip, like Andrew, found Nathanael and told him about Jesus the Messiah (**1:45**). Every believer is an evangelist. The Book of Acts is a book about Christians sharing Jesus. Is your faith in Jesus real? If so, then you cannot keep this precious faith to yourself. Christians cannot live in isolation from the society in which they live. If one keeps his or her faith to himself or herself, one's religion is not true religion, but religiosity. One cannot just share his or her faith with a certain race—carefully selected people of his or her own class or culture—but the Gospel must be shared with all races. John the apostle

writes: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (**Revelation 7:9**).

The Church’s message for the world is the Gospel of Jesus. The Christian community is ordained of God to fulfill God’s plan—redemption in and through Jesus. There is one single Gospel for the company of the Resurrection—Jesus. Jesus is the Evangel Himself. The Gospel has to do with events surrounding His birth, His death, and His Resurrection. Preaching the Cross of Jesus is crucial to Christianity. As one peruses the whole Bible, one discovers that the key to all Scripture is Jesus. In the first century, the driving force of Christian mission focused on the proclamation of the mighty acts of God in redemption. If one’s missionary outreach is to be biblical and effective, it must be Christo-centric. The preaching of the written Word is to lead the world to the Word made flesh (**John 1:14**).

It is through the sharing of the Good News of God that the work of Christ goes out. If God is to be glorified, the Gospel must be announced. Thus, as stated above, a living Church is always a missionary Church—a Church that proclaims Jesus as God’s only Way of salvation. One must “go” and “tell.” The early followers of Jesus had such a rich and deep faith that they carried “the faith” to others. They witnessed, as it were, together, and the Lord added to their number daily (**Acts 2:41**). The Church has come into being through God’s gift of Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity. It is through the Church, since Pentecost, that the message of the redeeming work of Jesus is proclaimed to the world. The Christian fellowship proclaims the true Way of Life (**John 14:6**).

Is your faith real? Is your faith so precious that you cannot keep it to yourself? For one to refuse to share his or her faith, one is guilty of religious individualism, which is a contradiction of the message of Christ. When one cherishes the Christian faith, one can no longer just treasure this in his or her bosom or keep to oneself. Do you comprehend the Good News? If so, then you recognize that the Gospel is God’s Good News for all sorts and conditions of men and women. When one truly realizes the true nature of God’s Way of salvation, one can only cry: “Woe is me if I do not preach it.” If one knows the true meaning of the word *Gospel*, one cannot remain silent about his or her faith in Jesus as the Way of Salvation. Is your faith real? Is your faith worth sharing? Can one keep “the faith” to himself or herself? Many Christians have left the central mission of the Church—go and make disciples.

Zeal for the Things of God

Is your faith on fire? Are you burning with zeal for the things of God? Listen to Paul as he admonishes Christians in Rome about their enthusiasm: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (**Romans 12:11**). Do you have the zeal of Andrew, Philip, and Paul? Even though redemption has been won, nevertheless, Christians still live on the frontlines. In the Cross of Christ, one discovers that everything necessary for forgiveness has been accomplished in and through the finished work of Christ. In this New Humanity, believers are set free to a new life to do good works in order to bring honor to God. God’s children do good, not as a condition of forgiveness, but rather in gratitude for forgiveness. God demands allegiance from His people. God’s love is so rich that He prepared reconciliation for sinful men and women even before humanity entered the struggle against Him (**Ephesians 1:4**). Are you a part of the witnessing

community of the Messiah?

Are you sluggish in your walk with God? Are you lukewarm or are you hot for God's Gospel? Are you aflame for the Good News of God? Do you live in a state of don't-care-ism? The Lord Jesus addresses one of the seven churches of Asia with these words of warning: " I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (**Revelation 3:15-16**). What does the Gospel mean to you? The Gospel is about One who came to rescue sinful humanity from sin (**Galatians 1:4**). This redemption is the Good News about salvation. The Gospel is not opinions about the interpretation of certain Scriptures. The Gospel is not about five acts of worship performed on Sunday morning. No, the Gospel is about Jesus. Jesus came preaching the Gospel, but, at the same time, He is the Gospel.

Mark reports the words of Jesus to the Apostles about the proclamation of Himself as the Gospel of God: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (**Mark 16:15**). Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus. In the Galatian Epistle, Paul writes: "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**Galatians 3:8-9**). Over two thousand years before God became flesh, He revealed to Abraham (2166 BC) the Gospel. The Gospel of God is Good News that He has devised a Way of salvation through faith, not works—"justify the Gentiles by faith." Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus of Nazareth: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed,"[a] meaning one person, who is Christ (**3:16**).

The Gospel is news about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, not notions advanced by certain religious groups. The Gospel preached to Abraham, two thousand years before the coming of the Messiah, was not about kitchens in the church building, the manner of distributing the bread in the Lord's Supper (pinch or break), the drink element in the Lord's Supper (wine or grape juice), the manner of singing (accapella or instrumental), and so on. The Gospel is about God's method of salvation—"justified by faith" (**2:16**). The message that Jesus told His disciples to proclaim, shortly before His ascension cannot be tampered with. The message of salvation is about Jesus: "But when God, who set me apart from birth[a] and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles (**1:15**).

Paul preached Jesus. Jesus is the "faith" that Paul preached. Again, listen to Paul as he captures the very essence of the Gospel that he proclaimed in the province of Galatia: "I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (**1:22-23**). "Preaching the faith" is equivalent to preaching the Gospel. Preaching the Gospel is equivalent to preaching Jesus. Some wanted to add to the Gospel, but the apostle objected strenuously about the merging of Law and Gospel as conditions of salvation:

We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' 16 know that a man is not

> justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified (**2:15-16**).

Paul defines the Gospel in the first part of this Epistle: "who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age" (**1:4**). Is it any wonder that Paul warns the Galatians about holding to this truth—Jesus gave Himself for our sins. Listen once more to Paul as he calls a curse down upon anyone, even angels, who preach another way of salvation other than by faith in Him:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— [7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (**1:6-9**)!

The Church is a witnessing community of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for the redemption of both men and women. Christians should never confuse what is essential (the Gospel) with the non-essentials. What is taught in many congregations is largely unintelligible to the world at large. Even though tradition has its value, nevertheless, it must never be equated with the Word of God itself. In spite of differences within the witnessing community, the Church should be prepared to listen with patience to other Christians whose views arouse one's antagonism in order to reach them for Christ.

The witnessing community of Christ needs to recapture Jesus' instructions in the Great Commission as reported by Mark: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. [16] Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (**Mark 16:16**). Justification by faith alone is the very heart and the very substance of the Christian Gospel. Salvation is the initiative of God's love. The witnessing Church is the bearer of the Gospel of God's forgiveness and is the home of the new fellowship of love, a love that has its origin in God. Once more, in this Galatian Epistle, Paul hammers home the point of the Gospel:

> Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."[d] [12] The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."[e] [13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."[f] [14] He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (**3:11-14**).

The message has concreteness, which is concerned with facts. Paul delivered what he had received. In Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, he writes with conciseness concerning the very heart of the Christian message, a message the Church is to proclaim:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [3] For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**).

As one recalls the words of Jesus in **Matthew 28:18-20**, one is confronted with the question: What is the whole calling of the Church? The answer is: It is to fulfill the mission entrusted to it by Christ. Earlier, Jesus, in His prayer to the Father, says, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (**John 17:18**). The ministry of the Church is related to the ministry of Christ. It is through the ministry of the Church that Christ is at work. It is in this vein that Paul reminds the Philippians: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:12-13**). The Church is indispensable to the proclamation of God's Gospel in a pagan society. Yet again, pay attention to Paul as he seeks to give details of the true nature of ministry among the redeemed:

> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21] God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 5:18—6:1**).

Are you an ambassador for the faith? Unless one is a representative for the faith, one is not holding to the faith. As a witnessing Church, the Church must, as Paul calls awareness to the Gospel to the Corinthians, witness to itself. In other words, the Christians community, as it were, must constantly remind itself of the Good News of God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus since so many Christians are indifferent rather than excited for the kingdom of God. Jesus sets forth the Gospel in His conversation with Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:1 6**). That is the Gospel. This is the urgent task of revivals—call attention to the urgency of the Gospel of God. Paul, in his last letter to Timothy, encouraged him with the following words:

> Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, [9] for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. [10] Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**).

All Christians need this reflection upon what Christianity is really all about. Not only must the Church witness to itself, but it must also witness to its children. Parents, as members of

the Christian community, have a responsibility to tell their children about God's interaction in history for the salvation of humanity. The witnessing community must hand on the Gospel it has received. This witnessing begins at home. By passing this scheme of redemption on to his or her children, an individual is passing on the Gospel to future generations. This call to the Christian faith begins in the home. God told Moses about religious education for the children:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.[a] 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**).

Witnessing to one's children is a means of fulfilling the Great Commission. As mothers and fathers, do you tell your children Bible stories? Unfortunately, many parents no longer share with their children the stories out of God's Word, and, sad to say, they themselves no longer know the Book. It is not uncommon for Christian parents to tell their children about Winnie the Pooh as well as many other fictional stories, but neglect to tell them stories about Abraham, Daniel, Joseph, Elijah, Naaman, and so on. The Church dies when the Bible is neglected and forgotten. Is the Word of God written upon your being? The words of Paul about Timothy's childhood is revealing:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (**2 Timothy 3:14-15**).

Is the Word of God in your blood, so to speak? Is it written upon your heart? Is it a part of your breathing? Is it a part of your way of life? Mothers and fathers must bring their children to Christ. One cannot delegate this responsibility to others, even though others may contribute to their spiritual understanding of spiritual things. It is not just mothers that participate in this training; it is also grandmothers. Once more, listen to Paul as he begins his second Epistle to Timothy as he recalls the background training of Timothy: " I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also (**1:5**). The things revealed in the Bible are for those who are yet to be born. The Church must witness concerning Christ as well as God's history of redemption, beginning with the creation of Adam and Eve.

> O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old—3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. 5 He decreed statutes for

> Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, [6] so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. [7] Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands (**Psalm 78:1-8**).

ETHICAL CONDUCT
PREREQUISITE TO EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Not only are Christians to witness to themselves and to their children, but they must also witness to the world. But in witnessing to the world, every believer must look at himself or herself. In other words, Christians must examine themselves in order to not bring the Gospel of God under condemnation (**Matthew 28:20**). Is your life a life of light and salt? Are you walking in the lust of the flesh? Or are you walking in the Spirit? Are you an example to Christians as well as to non-Christians? Paul, in this regard, wrote to the Corinthians:

> Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. [25] Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. [26] Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. [27] No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**).

If Christians are going to "cut any ice," so to speak, they must exemplify Christ in their day-to-day walk with Him. It is in this same vein that Paul reminds Timothy:

> [9] This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance [10] (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. [11] Command and teach these things. [12] Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (**1 Timothy 4:9-12**).

The world is right in wanting a personal witness in one's way of life. Without this witness, the witness concerning Christ as the Savior of the world will not fly. Unless the world sees Christ in the Christian community—each individual person—the world will yawn and turn away. Whenever unkindness is done, God's will is not done. Since God is love, Christians need to illustrate love and godly behavior in their walk with Him (**Ephesians 4:17—5:21**). Are we unlovely? Are we ungodly? Are we diabolical? Are we resistant against God's action to us in and through Jesus Christ? If the witnessing community understands God's grace, this knowledge, in and of itself, will change one's external behavior. This is why the Church still needs this testimony about God's Gospel. Paul writes to Titus about grace and behavior:

> For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. [12] It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled,

upright and godly lives in this present age, [13] while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, [14] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (**Titus 2:11-14**).

A renewal of Christianity in the world must begin among the followers of Christ. One way of renewal is through prayer. Prayer is one of the evidences of a living faith and, at the same time, an adequate confession of faith. One can say that Paganism begins where prayer ends. Men and women often practice what they don't preach—materialism. In a world of worldliness, the witnessing community often ignores Jesus' stern statement: " But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (**Matthew 6:33**). The deadliest enemy in the Christian Church today is practical atheism. The world is too much a part of the Body of Christ.

Christians need to reevaluate the world of short-term with the world of long-term—a citizenship in heaven. Paul tells the Philippians: "Our citizenship is in heaven" (**Philippians 3:20**). If the witnessing community is to be effective in its outreach to the lost, each member must refuse to live as an enemy of the Cross of Christ. Ethical conduct is prerequisite to effective evangelism:

[17] Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. [18] For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. [20] But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (**3:17-21**).

Prior to this admonition, Paul reminds the Philippians about bringing their lives into harmony with the Gospel of Christ:

[12] Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. [14] Do everything without complaining or arguing, [15] so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe [16] as you hold out[a] the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing (**2:12-16**).

Again, Paul writes to the Colossians with urgency about proper behavior:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things

above, not on earthly things. [3] For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. [6] Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.[b] [7] You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. [8] But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. [9] Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (**Colossians 3:1-10**).

Renewal of One's Inner Faith

If the Christian community is to effectively evangelize the world, it must recapture the sense of heavenly-mindedness—a life in God. Each member of the witnessing community must brand, as it were, the following words of the psalmist on his or her forehead: "Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his[a]; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture" (**Psalm 100:3**). Since the family of God believes in God the Father almighty and His creation, the Church must stand still, as it were, and reflect upon the things of God. The words of **Psalm 46:10** rings loud and clear for the believer: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

If the Church is to discharge its responsibilities of proclaiming God's Salvation in and through Jesus, each member must continually renew and deepen his or her life in humble repentance and thankfulness for God's mercy and love (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27**). The inner life of the Church depends upon religious devotion in the home. If there are no prayers in the home, the Church will not be as strong as it ought to be. If there are not private and diligent studies of God's Word, the Church will not be as fervent in zeal as it should be. One's failure to pray and study results in a Sunday gathering as weary, musty, lifeless, dull, and unprofitable. Attendance on Sunday morning is valuable for the people of God, but, at the same time, there must be daily activities in spiritual things. The words of the psalmist again drive home this point: "His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night" (**Psalm 1:2**).

If one expects spiritual maturity in the Lord, one must study the Word of God on a regular basis. It is in this vein that Peter writes: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, [3] now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (**1 Peter 2:2**). If the believer is not concerned, from first to last, with the mighty acts of God in human history, he or she will not grow in their salvation. God's way with men and women is to lead them to repentance. Through faith and repentance, one is delivered from one's corrupt and paralyzing past so that one may serve Him in newness of life (**Romans 6:1-14**). The Gospel of God teaches not just an outward and temporal relationship to God, but rather an inward attitude of the righteousness of the heart. In order for there to be this kind of commitment, there must a new outlook on life and a new way of living—living for God. For one to be a Christian, there must be a complete change of mind in one's priorities.

Since your conversion to Christ, are you still going around without ever having made an adult commitment to follow Christ? In Christ, there can be no growth until one makes a decision—a decision of dedication to serve Christ as Lord of one's life. Many Christians still live a barren, fruitless life in Christ. Is your will captive to Jesus or to Satan? Sin means that one's will is captive to his or her desires. In other words, one who is captive to his or her own desires is one who puts himself or herself as the center of the world. In conversion, there is a beginning, but no end. One never stops serving. Christians are to live radically changed lives. Are you devoted to God? One's dedication to God contributes to the total transfiguration of one's life, which life is lived in such a way that it works toward redemption of the world.

The very heart of the Christian faith is loyalty of God's will in one's life. In other words, in one's walk with God, there will be an utter self-abandonment to God. Has your life been made a tool for the living God? Has your life been made an instrument for the advancement of His will upon earth? Do you ever pray the words of Jesus: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:10**)? One way of renewal is through prayer. Is your life a sacrifice for the kingdom of God (**Romans 12:1-2**)? Do you pray? Remember that prayer simply means that you come to seek God because you need Him. One can also say that prayer is one's response to God's revelation of Himself. Jesus prayed! Do you pray?

Within just a few hours of His death, He prayed in a place called Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:26-46**). On the Cross, He prayed **Psalm 22:1**—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Matthew 26:46**). It is at the Cross of Jesus that one sees what sin means. Since Christians believe and accept His forgiveness, they must go regularly to God in prayer. Do you ever want to give up? If so, then you should reread the words of Luke as he reports the words of Jesus in the Parable of the Persistent Widow (**Luke 18:2-8**). Luke introduces this parable with these words about prayer: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up" (**18:1**). One reason for setting aside a certain time for prayer is that one may be at the disposal of God at all times. Are you praying for sensitivity to the voice of God in His Word?

Prayer is just one aspect of one's worship. Is your life a life of worship? Do you surrender your body to God as a living sacrifice, which is one's spiritual act of worship? What is worship? Worship is the response of the soul to the uncreated. Worship is always a reference to the Absolute and Eternal God. In worship, one responds to the impact of Eternity. Many Christians profess faith in God, but, on the other hand, their lives demonstrate that they hardly ever think of Him. Paul writes in this regard: "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good" (**Titus 1:16**).

Christians must die to self in order that they may live for God (**Romans 6:11-14**). Jesus demands not only one's mind, but He also demands allegiance of one's total being (**Matthew 22:34-40**). God's people are told: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another" (**Hebrews 10:25**). Sunday gatherings are important, but, at the same time, Christians should not go unfed for six days. Christians still need times of retreat with God during the week; otherwise, famine of the soul sets in. The words of Luke set the tone for spiritual renewal:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke

bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (**Acts 2:46-47**).

BAPTISM IN THE GREAT COMMISSION

Baptism is also a witness of one's acceptance of the message of salvation by faith. Ten days after Jesus' remarks concerning the proclamation of the Gospel and the immersion of those who accepted the Good News of God's Way of salvation in and through Christ, one observes the Day of Pentecost in which three thousand were baptized. Luke reports: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**Acts 2:41**). Baptism is one of the means whereby each believer demonstrates to the Church that he or she accepts the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, God's Anointed One. Another example is found in Philip's preaching in Samaria. Luke writes: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (**Acts 8:12**). If one believes the message of the Gospel, one submits to baptism. Baptism is one of the foremost ways of announcing your commitment to Jesus as Lord. Following their acceptance of the message by baptism, one reads: "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them" (**8:14**).

The conversion of Cornelius is also quite revealing (**Acts 10**). Cornelius sends for Peter, and, after his arrival, he informs Peter: "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (**10:33**). In the course of Peter's words, Peter draws attention to Jesus as the Savior of the world. In his comments, he announces the means of forgiveness: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (**10:36**). Again, Peter focuses in on the message of salvation: "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead" (**10:42**). How is forgiveness of sins received? Peter alludes to the Old Testament prophets for his answer: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**10:43**).

On this occasion, the Gentiles received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as did the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (**10:44-46**). Did they receive forgiveness of sins when they believed? Did this outpouring of the Holy Spirit fall on children of Satan or children of God? The Gentiles received this outpouring of the Holy Spirit prior to baptism. Upon seeing their acceptance of the message and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, Peter issued the command for baptism (**10:47-48**). Immediately, Luke writes: "The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God" (**11:1**). Sometime later, Peter explained God's acceptance of the Gentiles into the Christian community. In this explanation he says: "He purified their hearts by faith" (**15:9**). Luke also records Lydia's response to "Paul's message" by being baptized (**16:13-15**). Faith does not exclude baptism (**Mark 16:16**). Even though one becomes a child of God through faith (**Galatians 3:26**), nevertheless, baptism is the means whereby one is inducted into the Body of Christ (**3:27**), which operation is the operation of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). When one becomes a part of the Christian community, one becomes a part of the new creation (**2 Corinthian 5:17**).

Once more, one can say that baptism was/is a visible sign that they had "received the word of God." It is in a sense a public declaration of one's acceptance of the Gospel of God. Baptism, so it seems to me, is a divinely appointed seal upon one's faith. It is a seal upon that cleansing and forgiveness of sins, which God grants in response to faith (**Acts 10:43; 15:9**). Baptism is a way of publicly announcing one's faith in Jesus. To illustrate this concept, one only needs to turn their attention to Abraham's justification and God's command for circumcision. Abraham's circumcision was not the cause of his justification, but faith. Paul explains:

> Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. [10] Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! [11] And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (**Romans 4:9-12**).

Is one justified before or after baptism? Is not baptism also a sign or seal of the righteousness that God credits to the one who puts his or her trust in Jesus. Again, in the Galatian Epistle, Paul calls forth Abraham to demonstrate how a man or woman is put in a right relationship with God:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."[a] [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you."[b] [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (**Galatians 3:6-9**).

Out of one hundred and forty-five verses in Galatians (six chapters), Paul mentions baptism one time. The verses before baptism (**3:27**) address the subject of justification by faith, not baptism (**3:23-26**). In verse twenty-six, he writes: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." To assert that baptism precedes justification runs counter to the whole of apostolic teaching. Just a casual glance at **Romans 4:9-11** demonstrates emphatically that, in the case of Abraham, initiation through circumcision followed his justification by faith. Abraham's faith was the condition precedent to his circumcision, not the other way around. If the issue of baptism had been as dominant as circumcision was among the Jews, Paul, no doubt, would have said that men and women receive baptism as a seal of the righteousness credited to them through faith. What is necessary to salvation is faith in God through Jesus Christ, which baptism is the sign.

On the other hand, if one rejects Christian baptism, one rejects the message of salvation. Baptism is, in a sense, an acknowledgement that God's way of atonement for sins is right. Luke adds his comments to the words of Jesus concerning the baptism of John the Baptist and the religious leaders:

> All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words,

acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. [30] But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John (**Luke 7:29-30**).

John the Baptist baptized those who repented, that is to say, he baptized those who took up a new attitude to God and to life, a life under God's control. One observes two things about John's baptism: (1) A solemn seal upon the public declaration of repentance, and (2) A solemn seal of their forgiveness as individuals waiting for the coming of the Messiah that John announced. The water-baptism by the disciples of Jesus probably meant what it did for John's disciples, a solemn seal upon the repentance of those who accepted their message of salvation in and through Jesus. Baptism admitted them into the ranks of those who were qualified for God's coming kingdom.

On another occasion, Jesus asked the religious leaders a question about John' baptism: "Tell me, [4] John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men (**20:3**)? Just as John's baptism was from heaven, so Christian baptism is from heaven, not from men. When one rejects Christian baptism, one rejects God's purpose for himself or herself. When one discards Christian baptism, one denies that God's Way of salvation is right. Baptism is one means whereby one acknowledges that God's Way of redemption is right. When one refuses Christian baptism, one rejects the Gospel of God, which is essentially a message concerning the gift of salvation by grace through faith in His Son. In baptism one can also say that faith goes beyond one's understanding and penetrates into the heart. In baptism, one shares in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. As one approaches the water of Christian baptism, one is struck with awe and impelled to bow in adoration for such matchless love.

Christians did not choose the symbol of water; God Himself chose water-baptism for His New Community, the fellowship of His Son Jesus. In baptism, one discerns, as it were, visible words of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (**Romans 6:1-10**). Within baptism, one takes a look at the witness and the effectual sign of God's grace. During baptism, one sees the activity of God in the salvation of humanity. As one submits to baptism, one is reminded of what Christ accomplished for humanity—redemption from sins and restoration of the broken fellowship between God and humanity. Yes, baptism proclaims what God has done for lost sinners. Whenever one is confronted with doubts about his or her salvation, one can respond by saying, "I have been baptized." In this confession, one is basing the certainty of one's salvation upon the finished work of Christ. Baptism, in and of itself, has not efficacy apart from faith in Jesus.

In the heart of baptism is the Gospel of God. In baptism, one sees the richness of one's Christian heritage. As one is plunged beneath the waters of baptism, one is reminded that the emphasis is upon God's actions, not the actions of men and women. In other words, one is reminded that salvation is by grace through faith, not works (**Titus 3:4-7**). There is a sense in which baptism marks the beginning of the Christian life. Baptism must not become an empty sign. Baptism is not magic. When one is baptized, one gives his or her pledge of obedience to a new life (**Romans 6:1-23**).

Baptism is a sign of the finished work of Christ upon Calvary for the redemption of humanity. Again, one can say that baptism is a sign and seal of God's grace. In the watery grave of baptism, one is reminded that the Cross of Jesus is a condemnation of the values

of the world. In Christian baptism, one confesses that justification is by faith alone, which is the heart and substance of the Good News of God (**Galatians 3:6-14**). Salvation is the initiative of the sovereign love of God (**Ephesians 1:4**). Baptism is the awakening of the hearts of men and women to the self-giving action of God and, at the same time, one's response to God's Way of salvation by grace through faith. There is a sense in which one could say, "baptism establishes a relationship between the human and the divine." Baptism suggests a clean break with the past (**Romans 6:1-8; Colossians 3:1-17**). When one accepts the water-baptism of Christ, one expresses the devotion of his or her heart to Christ. Baptism is the outward sign of one's surrender to Jesus as Lord, which is a necessary part of one's conversion. Yes, in baptism, one acknowledges that God's Way is right.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the scenic root of witnessing to the lost world and to the church through three avenues—preaching, living, and baptism. The messenger of God's salvation must talk to men and women on the other side of the world, but, at the same time, the proclaimers of God's Gospel must not forget the man or woman on the other side of the room. Whenever one understands the supreme cost of redemption upon the Cross, one will become a missionary to everyone he or she knows. If the Christian community fails to reach out to the lost, the church becomes irrelevant by indifference to its mission—preaching Jesus. One objective in coming together as a collective fellowship is to listen to the Word, which opens the mind and heart to the message of grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. The church has been chosen by God as the vehicle of His revelation of justification by faith in and through His Son.

The church must continue to preach Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity. The church of Jesus must continue to uphold that the atonement did not take place through Rama, Krishna, Buddha, or Mohammed, but in and through Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). The Atonement took place in Him and through His name alone. The primary focus of the Christian community is the proclamation of the Good News about God's Way of salvation. As a witnessing church, the company of Resurrection must continue to discharge the function of proclaiming the Good News of God's Plan of salvation in and through Jesus. The church must bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the bridge between God and humanity. If one expects to receive God's mercy, this mercy can only be found at the place of horror—the Cross of Jesus. The church proclaims Jesus Christ as the heart of the Gospel because in His Person, Jesus unites the human and the divine natures.

As one turns to the he second avenue of witnessing, one ought to focus attention upon his or life as members of the Body of Christ. Christianity is a business not only for Sundays, but for weekdays as well. If one wishes to bear testimony to the Gospel of God, there must not be a discrepancy between one's belief and practice. Jesus speaks of testimony to the world through loving one another: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (**John 13:35**). When one surrenders his or her life to Christ, one is in the army of Christ. In the sacrifice of Christ, one recognizes that God has rights over him or her. In other words, individuals are now the personal property of God. Since men and women are the personal property of God, both men and women must conduct themselves morally in order to honor God. Jesus, in

this same vein, says:

> 13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

The third avenue of witnessing to the world is through baptism. In baptism, one witnesses to the world that God's grace is enacted in this action on the part of the believer. Baptism calls forth a consciousness of God's grace afresh. In the act of baptism, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is made visible. Baptism as a symbol helps one to apprehend the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. When one goes down into the water, one observes an opening for His grace. In baptism, one witnesses to the church as well as to the world that he or she exercises one's dependence on the Unseen.

Baptism establishes a relation between the human and the divine; one shares in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Baptism represents an awakening and response of the soul to God. In this action of baptism, one witnesses God's self-giving action and one's response to God's love. Baptism witnesses the revealing action of God, and, at the same time, one witnesses God at work—seeking and finding. Baptism is a response of the creature to the Divine action of God on the Cross. In baptism one surrenders his former way of life and dedicates the rest of his or her life to God. In baptism, God allows every individual to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Is it any wonder that remission of sins is associated with baptism (**Acts 2:38; 22:16**).

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[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

a Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7

a Or *from my mother~s womb*

d Hab. 2:4

e Lev. 18:5

f Deut. 21:23

a Or *you at the first*

a Or *be a sin offering*

f Or *his only begotten Son*

a Or *The LORD our God is one LORD*; or *The LORD is our God, the LORD is one*; or *The LORD is our God, the LORD alone*

a Or *hold on to*

a Some manuscripts *our*

b Some early manuscripts *coming on those who are disobedient*

a Or *and not we ourselves*

a Gen. 15:6

b Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

Christianity Versus Isolationism

Thrust Statement: **God's wants His people to work together through His company of redeemed ones.**

Scripture Reading: **Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Corinthians 5:17—6:1**

The Church: God's Instrument of Outreach

It is not uncommon for individuals to think that God authorizes them to live their lives in isolation from other Christians. Many do not see the need of identifying with a local body of believers. This study will focus on the reason(s) for God's desire that His people identify with His community of redeemed ones. One question that every believer must cope with is: why has God saved me? Another question that every believer should inquire into is: is the church important in the scheme of God's redemptive plan? Why should I meet with God's people? Why should I evangelize? Why should I encourage other Christians to be faithful in their service to the Creator of heaven and earth? Have you presented yourself as a living sacrifice to the cause of Christ?

Paul sets forth the major reason as to why one should present his or her body as a living sacrifice to God. As one reflects upon a "living sacrifice," one should also consider the question: Why has God saved me? It is in this regard that Paul stresses the "why" of salvation (**Ephesians 1:12**). In summary of the "why" of salvation, Paul goes right to the kernel of redemption: "In order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory" (**1:12**). Once more Paul says, as cited above, that since salvation is the "gift of God," one should never forget that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**2:10**). God's people are to be "completely humble and gentle" and "patient, bearing with one another in love" and making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**4:2-3**). Peter expresses the "why" of salvation this way:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now

you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (**1 Peter 2:9-10**).

In view of the fact that we are a part of the chosen people, one must work within this framework. The terms that Peter employs to describe the Christian fellowship indicate togetherness, not separateness. The church is described as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God." Every Christian is a priest of God, both men and women. As a priest each Christian belongs to the Christian church. Those who responded to the Good News of God on the Day of Pentecost were added to the body of believers (**Acts 2:47**). In other words, the Lord added the ones being saved from day to day "together." Again, one reads of togetherness in this same chapter: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (KJV, **2:45**). Did these believers live their lives in isolation from other believers? No! Listen once more to Luke as he describes the reaction of those who accepted Jesus:

> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, [47] praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (**2:46-47**).

When one is a part of the new community of God, one now presents his or her body as a living sacrifice to God in order that this sacrifice of commitment might bring praise to the One who raised him or her from the dead. The word priest, especially under the Old Testament, conjures up in every one's mind the offering of animal sacrifices. Under the Old Covenant, individuals brought animals for sacrifices as their offerings (worship) to God. But under the New Covenant, Christians make their work an offering to God. In other words, everything the believer does is done for God's glory. Even the most menial task is done to glorify God. All Christian meet together as a collective body of believers in order to encourage other Christians to faithfulness in their daily walk with God. Christians come together because they are already worshipers of the One True God. Every Christian makes his worship an offering to God.

Every Christian makes himself or herself an offering to God through presenting his or her own body to glorify God. Paul says, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship" (**Romans 12:1**). What God desires of every follower of Christ is a heart of love and a life of service in God's kingdom. If one wishes to communicate the love of God, one of the best ways is through one's life, not just through words. It is in this vein that Jesus says:

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Every person is called to be an obedient child of God. One and all are chosen to do what God likes, not what he or she likes. Each one is selected for service of

consecration to kingdom work. Since every Christian is a priest, he or she must present his or her work to God as his or her spiritual act of worship. Are you conscious that you are a part of God's chosen people? Are you mindful that you are a priest of God? Are you aware that you are to be holy? The Christian community, according to the words of Peter, constitutes a "holy people." What does this mean to you? Someone who is holy (ἁγιö, Jagios, "sacred") is separated from sin and consecrated to God. One who is holy is different. Are you unlike the world? God has chosen his people to be distinct in their behavior from the behavior of the world of darkness. God has elected His children to be poles apart from other men and women in their daily walk with Him. What is the difference? Well, one can say that the difference lies in one's outlook on life. For the believer, his or her life is dedicated to God's will and to God's service. Every believer is a partner of the Living God. One should never forget that within the community of God that all are performers, not simply auditors or observers.

The church today, simply pays lip service to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Every Christian group is a commando group. God expects His people to penetrate the world of darkness for His glory and His honor. Many Christians are totally lost to the concept of saltiness to the world of corruption. Christians must refuse to sit down complacently under the pressures of the society in its rebellion against God's Law. The Gospel of Christ compels everyone who responds to the Good News of salvation by grace to be different from other people. No Christian can be just ordinary, for every believer is of God. Paul, in dealing with sin among the Corinthians, had to remind the saints that their bodies did not belong to themselves, but to God:

> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. [19] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; [20] you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (**1 Corinthians 6:18-20**).

Because Christians are a part of the living Body of Christ, they are to proclaim God's way of salvation to a lost and dying world. The church of Jesus is identified as the company of the converted. The church sees all things in the context of Christ. As one reflects upon the death and resurrection of Christ, one gives a new context to one's involvement in the Christian society. Peter calls attention to the "spiritual house" that everyone born of God is a part of. Listen to Peter as he seeks to call attention to the activities of God's chosen people:

> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— [5] you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (**1 Peter 2:4-5**).

Every Christian is a living stone, and the church (community) is a living structure into which everyone is built, or added (**Acts 2:41**). Many believers today think that they can live in isolation from other believers, but this is not the biblical way. Christianity is community. It is involvement; it is belonging. Every man and woman only find their true place in life when they become a part of this living edifice of God, which is the Body of

Christ. Solitary religion, as advanced by some, is ruled out by God. William Barclay is correct when he writes: "Individualistic Christianity is an absurdity; Christianity is community within the fellowship of the Church."[1] Why did the author of Hebrews warn believers not to abandon the assembling of themselves together if it is not important (**Hebrews 10:25**). This passage, along with **Acts 20:25-28**, emphasizes the church in God's scheme of redemption. Listen to Paul as he addresses the overseers from Ephesus:

> Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.[a] Be shepherds of the church of God,[b] which he bought with his own blood (**Acts 20:25-28**).

Christians are to wage war against the forces of evil. Since God is the One who initiated salvation for a lost world through grace, then this grace should turn everyone into a fighting machine for the cause of Christ. Christians are to evangelize and to live pure lives in the presence of all. As one reflects upon God's grace, one immediately is confronted with the "how" of salvation. The "how" of salvation is an act of God "in" and "through" Jesus. Once an individual is put in a right relationship with God through faith, then the question arises: Why has God saved me? Has God saved you to be a hermit? Are you involved in kingdom work? One can say that the "why" of salvation is to glorify God through service within the spiritual house of God. Today, the theme of "Onward Christians Soldiers" is alien to the experience of many Christian churches. In the community that Jesus founded, there are no mere observers or auditors; but rather, all believers are involved in ministry. Christians need to see themselves as a task force to win the world to the Messiah. To rephrase the words of Peter, one can say that God called us into His service in order that we might become a fellowship of penetration. The meeting place of Christians should be a launching pad where Christians are propelled, as it were, to go out into the world to tell people, not who we are, but rather to whom we belong. Unfortunately today, many Christian churches place their loyalty to Christ upon their own unique, or odd, teaching of theology rather than loyalty to fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In the present day, the traditional gathering of the saints is a throwback to the Temple. The assembly nowadays is overemphasized as a worship service rather than as an assembly to push forward the strategy of winning souls to Christ and strengthening the saints. The church is the "company of the redeemed." The early church did not seek God's will in individual isolation. One cannot understand the idea of "company" without the concept of involvement. Elton Trueblood drives home this point when he writes: "The only purpose of a company is campaign."[2] Christians need to be actively engaged in finding out ways to get fellow believers on the production line of working for the kingdom of God. As one works out his or her salvation with fear and trembling, one must never forget that what one is doing day by day is in partnership with God. Sunday school teachers who are teaching small children and teenagers should employ this time to instill into their hearts a love for God and a desire to witness about Jesus as the Savior of the world.

When one is converted, one is in the army of God (**Ephesians 6:10; 2 Timothy 2:3-4**). God has called every believer to evangelize. Evangelism is not the profession of the so-called clergy, which is a throwback to Catholicism with its selected priests. The Christian Church, as a whole, does not use the word *priest* for its ordained, but the word *clergy*. Jesus told the disciples in **Luke 24** to bear testimony to the truth of His resurrection from the dead. Evangelism is simply the method of testimony—testimony about who Jesus is. When one is converted to Christ, one is called to be a witness about Jesus and His redemption made available through faith. The church is to be a fellowship of witnesses. In other words, the church was formed by Christ to accomplish His mission of evangelizing the world. It is in the regard that Paul writes:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

In order to reach out to people, there is a sense in which every Christian will have to travel light. Christians must be willing to sacrifice a certain amount of their freedom in order to witness for Jesus. It is not uncommon for many Christians to take Christianity too lightly. Do you see yourself as a taskforce for the advancement of God's kingdom? Do we think that Christianity is just sitting comfortably in pews and listening to the preacher and the special singers? Are you a soldier of the Cross? When Paul was incarcerated in Rome, he wrote a letter to the Philippians in which he spoke of Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier: "But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs" (**Philippians 2:25**). In Paul's last letter to Timothy, he encouraged him to: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (**2 Timothy 2:3**). Once more, Paul, in his letter to Philemon, writes: "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home" (**Philemon 2**).

Are we soldiers of the Cross of Jesus? Can we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with meaning? If we as a fellowship are not advancing, we are already retreating in our spiritual journey. Are you committed to the cause of Christ? One must bear in mind that commitment is never real unless it leads to evangelism; Christianity must move forward. If one wishes true commitment to Jesus, one must always be conscious that commitment to the cause of Christ will never be effective apart from a fellowship of committed Christians. Do you believe in Christianity? If so, then you will place yourself at the disposal of Jesus Christ for the work He has called you to do. Mere belief, said James, is never enough (**James 2:19**).

What does Christianity mean to you? What does the church mean to you? Are you a part of the company of the redeemed? Are you working within the local body of

believers for the advancement of God's kingdom upon earth? As you reflect upon your conversion, you should pray that God will help you know that conversion is not only an initial act, but that it is also a growing experience. God does not want His people to drift into spiritual idleness. He detests lukewarmness in His people (**Revelation 3:14-21**). When Jesus wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor, he addressed each letter to the congregation. Do you have a spiritual history in your pilgrimage of faith? Or are you where you were twenty years ago? Many Christians are the same today at the age of seventy as they were at the age of twenty. As one reflects upon the how and why of salvation, one discovers that the words of Peter reinforces the *how* and *why* of salvation:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. [11] Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. [12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (**1 Peter 2:9-12**).

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a Or *reasonable*

[1] William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 196.

a Traditionally *bishops*

b Many manuscripts *of the Lord*

[2] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 37.

a Or *be a sin offering*

Church and Ministry

Thrust statement: **The church is a society within a society.**

Scripture reading: **John 14:26; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

> Now the church is the embodiment of the Remnant ideal. It is a society within a society. But it is not an isolationist group, carefully fostering a private life of its own secluded from the contaminations of the world. It has to discharge a task in the world as well as to maintain its own inner life. It has to present the Gospel to those outside; and it can only do that effectively as its members live according to Christ in their relations to one another. In other words the Church has a dual role—apostolic in relation to those outside and pastoral in relation to those within.[1]

The Christian *ecclesia* is a society within a society. The body of Christ is composed of priests who serve the living God through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The church is to engage in the proclamation of the Gospel (apostolate) as well as to minister to those within the congregation (pastoral). Not only is the community of Christ to be involved in the proclamation of God's way of salvation to the world, but also it is to be concerned about other activities outside the church, that is to say, about justice. The church is to be the light of the world. In one's fulfillment of ministry, there is a sense in which one acts as an instrument of God to accomplish His desired goals in this life. Yet, on the other hand, one must also view ministry as participatory; in other words, God allows His children to participate in His ministry.

As one contemplates ministry, ministry is not limited to a particular group of saints, often called "clergy." Ministry is a function of every individual Christian; it is the body of Christ at work. If one has a proper perspective of ministry, his/her theology of the church should assist in one's ministry. Also, if one understands the various models of ministry, one's ministry should be more effective toward the advancement of God's

kingdom on earth. When one speaks of models of ministry, one might ask the question: What are models of ministry? Another important question is: What is a working theology of the church? In one's ministry, one also needs to become acquainted with the realities of the world?

WORKING THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

Models for Ministry

Before one can develop adequate models for ministry,[2] one must have a sound working theology of the church.[3] One's paradigm[4] of the church will shape his/her models of ministry. One's perception of the church determines one's attitude toward one's view of ministry as participatory or instrumentalist. In order for one to develop a working theology of the church, one must first determine what the word *church* means. What is the church? Is it a denomination? Is it an institution? Is it simply a religious social institution? Is it an organism? Is it the company of the redeemed? Is it the body of Christ? Is it the community of God on earth? Just how does one define or translate the word *church*? How is the true church identified? Did Christ establish an organization? Or did Christ bring a body of believers into existence? Just how should one characterize the church? One model of ministry is one's perception of the church.

Answers to the above questions determine, to a great extent, one's working theology of the church. For instance, some Christians are conditioned to identify the type of corporate organized religious body, of which they are a part, as the church of Jesus Christ, thereby excluding all others from belonging to the kingdom of God. In other words, any person who is not identified with his/her particular group, or denomination, is not a member of Christ's church. That which God intends as a rallying point for the lover of God and His truth has become a battle ground on which ecclesiastical wars are fought. Again, the questions are: What is your model of the church? Is it an ecclesiastical organization? Or Is it a community of believers? Anders Nygren objects, and rightly so, to the current model of the church as an organizational structure. He uses the following pregnant words against accepting the organizational structure of the church as a part of one's theology of the church:

> Did Christ establish the church, or not? That question has generally been answered about as follows. During his lifetime Jesus gathered a group of disciples around himself, but there was as yet no kind of organization. Then if one moves on a bit into history one meets an organization which girdles the globe. It bears the name of Christ and announces itself as his church. Within that organization one finds a rich diversity of offices, as well as sacraments, a Christian cultus, and so on. The question presents itself, did Jesus actually found that organization? Did he actually envision anything of the kind? Is it not rather the product of a development whose result was not at all what Jesus would have approved? Is it not, in any case, an anachronism to speak of the church as instituted by Christ?[5]

Emil Brunner's assessment of the contemporary situation is also full of insight as he expresses the predicament of the modern church: "The church of Christ ruled by

Christ is no longer Christianity, but the Church only as a corporate institution.[6] Jurgen Moltmann is also helpful in this area when he writes:

> If the church does not see itself as 'the church of society', or as the 'German', or 'white', or 'male', church (even though it can often enough really be described as these things in terms of its actual situation), but calls itself instead 'the church of Christ', then it will also have to make Christ its starting point in its own understanding.[7]

The Dimensions of a Doctrine of the Church Today

An adequate conception of ministry demands an adequate conception of the church. Since the church is God's community, it will reflect upon its life in Christ. The church worships the One who calls it into being, the One who liberates it, and the One who gathers it to Himself. The church presents itself before man and before God. Moltmann is correct when he writes: "For it stands for God to the world, and it stands for the world before God."[8] It is this perspective of relationship to the world before God that Paul speaks of his debt to men in his letter to Rome (**Romans 1:14**). Not only does every Christian participate in the Great Commission, but he/she also participates in teaching His disciples to adhere to His teachings (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Again, Moltmann correctly states, "the church of Christ is an 'open' church. It is open for God, open for men and open for the future of both God and men."[9] The church of Christ concerns itself with "messianic liberation and eschatological renewal of the world."[10] This concept of liberation is the ministry of every believer, not just clergy, that is to say, a select few with certain academic credentials.

The Trinitarian History of God

An understanding of the Trinitarian history of God can assist everyone in his/her participation in the ministry of God. According to the great commission, the Christian community does everything in the name of the triune God. The church sees itself in the Trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world. When one talks about the Trinitarian history of God, one is conscious of the "livingness of God which has moved out of itself . . . which can only be understood through participating and engaged knowledge," writes Moltmann.[11] To state more clearly, the Trinitarian history of God includes a knowledge of God's dealings with mankind. The church can understand much more clearly its own position or part in the movement of God's ministry with the world if it attempts to understand the Trinitarian history of God.

One's perception of his/her joining in the movement of the world through the history of God begins with a comprehension of the history of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in the light of His coming. God sends both Christ and the Holy Spirit. The history of Christ is seen in the light of His origin. (**John 1:1-15**). The gospels record the history of Jesus as the history of the Messiah. Jesus is introduced by the synoptic gospels in the light of His sending and His mission by God and the workings of the Holy Spirit. John says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (**John 3:16**).[12]

For Mark, the ministry of Jesus begins when the Holy Spirit is conferred on Him in baptism (**Mark 1:9-12**). Even though Matthew mentions the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism, nevertheless, he begins his history of Christ with the conception by the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:18-23**). Luke also begins the ministry of Jesus with the conception by the Holy Spirit (**Luke 1:26-35**). Again, Moltmann points out the role of the Spirit in the history of Christ: "The experience of the Spirit is to be found in the experiences of the history of Christ which men have in their own history."[13] Luke also records the promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift following baptism (**Acts 2:38**).

Paul also speaks of God sending forth His Son and His Holy Spirit in his letter to the Galatians (**Galatians 4:4-6**). Thus, as one reflects upon the origin of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, one is immediately thrown back into eternity. Moltmann points out, with justice: "The Trinity in the origin is the foundation of the Trinity in the sending, and hence the Trinity in the sending reveals the Trinity in the origin as being from eternity an open trinity."[14] In other words, Moltmann is saying that one cannot grasp the life of God in a finished circle. For Moltmann, one's concept of God must include the Trinity. It is in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit that humanity encounters God.

The history of the Trinity opens fellowship for humanity through the coming of the Son and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity works together for the salvation of mankind. One discovers in the history of the Trinity that the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son by freeing individuals for fellowship with the Trinity (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). This comprehension of Trinitarian history helps Christians to fathom the ministry of the Trinity, and the Trinity's grace in allowing man's participation in His ministry through the church of Jesus Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ

The name the church assumes requires that one sees the church as subject to Christ. Since the church is the church of Jesus, then the Christian community must align herself with Him. The Scriptures employ a number of christological titles to describe who Jesus is—"Messiah," Son of Man," "Lord," and "Logos." These titles help the church to understand the relationship of Jesus to His people. In the same manner, the relationship of the church to Christ is depicted with descriptive terms, such as, "the body of Christ," "the house of God," "God's people," and the communion of the saints."

Since the church is the church of Christ, the church makes Christ its starting point in its own self-understanding.[15] When one makes Christ his initial point of meditating upon the church of Jesus, then one must also contemplate the presence and activity of Christ in the church to fully appreciate God's call to participate in His ministry. When a child of God is conscious of the residence and movement of Christ in the church, then he/she leaps for joy in knowing that God allows His people to experience His ministry.

The Presence and Activity of Christ in the Church

The existence of the church is described through the activities of Christ. It is Christ who chooses, gathers, protects, and upholds His church. The final goal of Christ's activity is eternal life. Moltmann captures the true essence of the church when he writes:

> The activity of God's Son is universal. It extends in space to 'the whole human race' and in time to all generations 'from the beginning of the world to the end.' . . . He is the Christ of the one God for the whole human race. His choosing, gathering and protective activity creates the church, not as an institution for salvation or as a cultic group, but as a brotherhood to which the individual can profess loyalty as a 'living member'. Ultimately, the election, gathering and preservation of the church are not an end in themselves but serve 'eternal life', as the final goal of Christ's activity, and of the church created out of that activity, is called.[16]

The activity of Christ is centered in the Word. Yet, Jesus is the Word. He is the Word of proclamation. John identifies Jesus as the λοψγö τη§ ζωῆ [logos ths zwhs, "Word of life"] (**1 John 1:1**). Consider how Bultmann deals with the activity of Jesus as the Word.

> All the activity of Jesus is centered in the Word. . . . That is why John always represents Jesus as saying almost nothing except that he is speaking the Word of God. For John, from beginning to end, Jesus is not meant to be the 'historical Jesus'; he is the 'Word', the Word of the Christian proclamation.[17]

One looks to Jesus for the origin, the beginning, or the establishment of the proclamation of the Word. In the pronouncement of the Word, there is also the declaration of the gospel. The gospel is the dawn of the eschatological age. It is "good news" to a lost and dying world that Christ provides redemption for all those who believe in Him. It is not a statement about some remote future, but a statement about liberation. Isaiah speaks of this messianic age in glowing terms: "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners," (**Isaiah 61:1**).

The beginning activity of Christ's ministry involves three specific aspects: (1) teaching, (2) preaching, and (3) healing. Matthew says, "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**Matthew 4:23**). Mark sums up the mission as: '"The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"' (**Mark 1:15**). If the church is not preaching the good news, if the church is not fulfilling the great commission, and if the church is not the people of teaching, of preaching, of healing, and of the beatitudes, God's community loses its fellowship with the messianic mission of Jesus to the world and to "the least of these" (See **Matthew 5:3-10; 25:31-46**). The world and "the least of these" is still the concern of the Messiah.

Moltmann captures in concise language this new life and hope when he writes: "The church is the fellowship of those who owe their new life and hope to the activity of the risen Christ."[18] The church receives its liberation from the self-giving of Christ. Thus, the church of Christ exists in its fullness if it is obedient to the rule of the Servant of God in its adherence to the Great Commission and participates in the sharing of liberation through Christ as a new way of life. Every Christian participates in his/her ministry as a servant of Jesus Christ. Again, Moltmann seems to be right when he pens:

> The church is not a 'holy autocracy'; it is the fellowship of believers who follow the one Lord and have been laid hold of by the one Spirit. It is in principle the community of equals, equipped with equal rights and equal dignity. All have the gift of the Spirit. If, in thinking of Christ's self-surrender, we talk about 'the priesthood of all believers', then in thinking of Christ's lordship we must speak of 'the sovereignty of all believers.'[19]

In reflecting upon one's participation in the ministry of Christ, a proper understanding of the place of the church in the presence of Christ will enhance one's philosophy of ministry. For example, "The question *what* the church is, is not the same as the question *where* it is," says Moltmann.[20] It is not "Where the church is, there is Christ"; rather, "Where Christ is, there is the church." To state more plainly, "Where Christ is, the church had better be." It is in this vein that Jesus says, "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me" (**John 14:26**).

Again, Moltmann captures the essence of Jesus statement: "If the church is, according to its own claim, 'the church of Jesus Christ', then it is Christ who leads the church into its truth. In this case the true church is to be found where Christ is present."[21] Every believer participates in the ministry of Christ through becoming a servant of the Servant. Jesus instructs His disciples about true servanthood: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Matthew 20:28**). Where is Christ? Is He not present in "the least of these"? Is He not present in His community of believers? There is a sense in which Jesus is present in the proclamation, in the Lord's Supper, in water baptism, and in the fellowship of His believers.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE PROCLAMATION

Christ is present not only in the "least of the brethren," but He is also present in the apostolate, that is to say, the proclamation through Word and sacraments, and the community of the proclaimers in the fellowship of the brethren. The proclamation includes the missionary charge of Jesus to His disciples (**Matthew 28:18-20**). In this missionary instruction, Jesus promises His presence to the church in the proclamation (apostolate): "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**28:20**). Today, the church still takes up the missionary charge and participates in proclamation of the Gospel as Christ's representative. Jesus' promise runs thus: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (**Luke 10:16**). God has given "us the ministry of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:18**) and "has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**5:19**). Once more, Moltmann's view is to the point:

> In the movement of the apostolate the person of the apostle takes on the form of Christ's destiny. He does not merely bear Christ on his lips in the word of the gospel. He also 'carries in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in his body' (11 Cor. 4.10). . . . The promised presence of Christ is the presence of the one who was crucified.[22]

Christ's Presence Is in the Lord's Supper

In the sacraments, it is not only beneficial to see the presence of Christ, but it is also helpful to understand the purpose of the sacraments in relationship to the church. Just as Christ is present in the proclamation of the Word, so also is the promise of Christ's presence found in the Lord's Supper (**1 Corinthians 11:23-29**). It is in the Lord's Supper that one participates in the body and blood of Christ. Jesus describes the bread: "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (**11:24**), and the cup: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (**Mark 14:24**).

This presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is a feast of remembrance. Moltmann says, "It recalls to our memory the history of redemption, which took place on the cross of Christ for us."[23] Again, "This remembrance bridges the difference between the history there and the events here."[24] Once more, Moltmann reflects upon the presence of God and Christ in this feast: "The Lord's supper can further be understood as the earthly sign of the presence of the God who has become man and of the man who has been exalted to God."[25] Moltmann, in addition to the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, also develops the view that "The Lord's supper is the sacrament of confirmation and the path of grace."[26] Again, he writes:

> Baptism precedes the Lord's supper. It is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace. The Lord's supper is the sacrament of confirmation and the path of grace. Through baptism men and women are born again to eternal life. Through the Lord's supper they are sustained in that life. Accepted into the covenant of grace through baptism, believers are sustained in it through the Lord's supper.[27]

Again, Moltmann captures the participant's reflection of the Lord's supper when he writes: "In the eucharist the congregation thanks the triune God for all his acts of goodness and sets itself in his Trinitarian history with the world."[28] The significance of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine is that this supper joins the past and the future, but it also represents God's grace of liberation from sin, from wrath, from law, and from condemnation. In God's ministry of liberation, He allows His creatures to participate in this ministry of reconciliation.

Christ's Presence Is Found in Baptism

Baptism also contains a corresponding promise of Christ's presence (**Romans 6:3-5**). One is baptized into His death in order that one might also walk in a new life. Paul expresses it this way: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (**6:4**). The following extract from Moltmann explains graphically the role of baptism in the life of the believer: "Just as the Christian church is called into being through the proclamation of the gospel, so through baptism it is called to the freedom of the messianic era."[29]

Through baptism in Christ's name, one enters Christ's fellowship; through

baptism in the name of the triune God, one is "simultaneously set in the Trinitarian history of God."[30] In other words, through baptism one enters into covenant relationship with the Trinity. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace. It is in baptism, says Moltmann, that one is given the certainty of God's grace "through the medium of visible signs."[31] In baptism one can look back and say, "that is the day that my sins were washed away." As a result of one's new life through faith in Christ and submission to baptism, one then participates in service of Christ for the advancement of God's kingdom.

Christ's Presence Is Found in the Fellowship of Believers

One sees the presence and activity of Christ in the body of believers: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (**Matthew 18:20**). When Christians assemble, they relate the story of Christ and their own story with His history, because their fellowship and activity in God's kingdom springs from the story of liberation brought about through the vicarious sufferings of Christ. Moltmann is perfectly right when he insists that:

> The messianic community belongs to the Messiah and the messianic word; and this community, with the powers that it has, already realizes the possibilities of the messianic era, which brings the gospel of the kingdom to the poor, which proclaims the lifting up of the downtrodden to the lowly, and begins the glorification of the coming God through actions of hope in the fellowship of the poor, the sad and those condemned to silence, so that it may lay hold on all men. . . . Where the gospel corresponds to Christ, and the messianic fellowship of the people corresponds to the gospel the truth of the proclamation is recognizable from the freedom it creates. The 'true world' is promised in the gospel of Christ and is made accessible in the power of the Holy Spirit.[32]

The Christian fellowship "must stop being a church of ministers functioning on behalf of laymen, and become a charismatic fellowship in which everyone recognizes his ministry and lays hold on his charisma.[33] In other words, the fellowship of believers must recapture the priesthood of all believers, not a special class of priest. Every Christian is to participate in the ministry of Christ. Within the church there are no laymen versus clergy—in God's kingdom all are ministers. Ben Campbell Johnson explains the concept of a participatory ministry this way: "To be a minister of Jesus Christ means to participate in his body, the incarnate presence of God in the world."[34]

THE CHURCH IN THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The church in the presence of the Holy Spirit focuses on the power of the Spirit as the Spirit empowers the presence and activity of Jesus Christ in the world and the church. In other words, it is the Spirit that manifests Christ and unites us with Him and glorifies Him in men (**1 Corinthians 12:13**; **Titus 3:5**). Moltmann maintains that "It is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in particular that depicts the processes and experiences in which and through which the church becomes comprehensible to itself as the messianic

fellowship."[35] It is these "processes and experiences" that Moltmann defines as the "means of salvation."[36] That is to say, "proclamation, baptism, the Lord's Supper, worship, prayer, acts of blessing, and the way in which individual (sic) and fellowship live."[37]

According to Moltmann, "the presence of the kingdom of God and the revelation of the divine mystery of the last days are to be found in the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit."[38] Peter in his Pentecostal sermon speaks of this eschatological gift of the Spirit to believers (**Acts 2:38**). Paul, too, in his Corinthian correspondence, speaks of the activity of the Spirit in the church (**1 Corinthians 12:1-13**). One must not discount the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian experiences. The Holy Spirit is associated with the new birth. Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (**John 3:5**). Also, Paul relates the Holy Spirit's activity with regeneration: "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" (**Titus 3:5-6**). Again, Paul informs the Corinthians that no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit" (**1 Corinthians 12:3**). In this same correspondence, Paul recognizes the Holy Spirit's role of induction into the body of Christ (**12:13**).

THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When Christians celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper, "the church sees itself in the presence of the Holy Spirit as the messianic people destined for the coming kingdom."[39] That is not to say that one sees the Spirit in the sacraments, but rather, one sees the sacraments in the movement and the presence of the Holy Spirit.[40] This is also true of the various ministries of the Spirit; the ministries are conceived of in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Again, Moltmann aptly remarks: "There is no 'Spirit of the sacraments' and no 'Spirit of the Ministry', there are sacraments and ministries of the Spirit."[41]

For Paul, the church is where the Spirit manifests its power in an abundance of spiritual gifts (**1 Corinthians 14**). According to Joel, the Spirit is the gift promised in the last days (**Joel 2:28-29**; see also **Acts 2:12-21**). Fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit (**Acts 2**). Hans Kung also draws attention to the church as the creation of the Spirit.[42] The Spirit calls them into being (**Titus 3:5**), and the Spirit creates unity (**Ephesians 4:3**). Paul writes about the charismata (χαριψσματα, carismata), which means the energies of new life, or the powers of the Holy Spirit. The gifts in the Corinthian church existed as a result of the creative grace of God. The various ministries that exist in the church today exist as a result of the powers of the Spirit. In the Roman letter, Paul speaks of eternal life as the "gift of God" [cavrisma tou' qeou', carisma tou qeou](**Romans 6:23**).

In the ministry of the Spirit, Paul does not write about "ecclesiastical orders." In other words, he speaks not of hierarchy, but of service in Christ's ministry. Every

individual is a servant in the Spirit's ministry. This ministry is both instrumentalist and participatory. If one has an exaggerated concept of the instrumentalist aspect of ministry instead of the participatory philosophy, this instrumentalist model may lead to a super ego. It is in this regard that Campbell writes: "When the ego becomes inflated, it tends to operate disconnected from its data. Recall Salieri's confession: 'I wanted Fame. . . . I wanted to blaze like a comet across the firmament of Europe!' Here is an ego gone mad. The desire stems from a hunger for recognition beyond the capacities of the person."[43]

An inflated ego is indicative of the instrumentalist philosophy of ministry that exceeds the boundaries for a healthy attitude toward one's ministry. One must never forget that God in His mercy allows man a participatory ministry. Moltmann goes right to the point about participatory ministry when he writes: "Through the powers of the Spirit, the one Spirit gives every individual his specific share and calling, which is exactly cut out for him, in the process of the new creation."[44] The Spirit is the Spirit of power. Paul speaks of the Spirit's power in the resurrection: "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" (**Romans 8:11**).

Through the power of the Spirit, every individual exercises the gift or gifts that the Spirit has given to him/her. Again, Moltmann expresses that even the most menial task is exercising one's gift: "The widow who exercises mercy is acting just as charismatically as a bishop."[45] One must never forget that within the Kingdom of Christ there is no essential difference between the so-called clergy and individual member of the church, or God's community. In other words, every person exercises his/her own function of ministry in the power of the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12**). The questions that confront everyone are: What is ministry? What are models, or functions of ministry? Is one an instrument in ministry? Or is one a participant in ministry?

When one speaks of himself/herself as an instrument of God in His ministry, one should always bear in mind that this simply means that one is a bearer of Christ. One must not look upon his/her ministry as one of more privilege than another believer, but rather, one should see his/her role in God's ministry as a bearer of Christ, that is to say, one's ministry is a symbolic presence of God."[46] How should one view the various functions in ministry? Are individuals the voice of God? Are individuals the hands of God? Are individuals the feet of God? Some respond by saying yes, which is the instrumentalist view of a ministry.[47] On the other hand, some Christians view themselves as participants in God's ministry. A healthy view of ministry is to view one's ministry as consisting of both—instrumentalist and participatory.

MODEL OR FUNCTIONS OF MINISTRY

> In most instances where "minister" or "ministering" is found in English versions, the Greek has some form of *diakonia* ("service" or "ministry"), which occurs thirty-four times. A related noun, *diakonos* ("servant," "minister," or "deacon"), occurs thirty times. The verb *diakoneo* ("to serve" or "to serve as a deacon") is used thirty-seven times.[48]

What are models of ministry? What is a model? What is ministry? These are

questions that everyone must seek an answer to in order to effectively minister to people. Once an individual's working theology of the church is developed, then, one is able to set forth a coherent paradigm of ministry as it relates to the various functions exercised in the fulfillment of one's ministry. Under the rubric of models of ministry, one's ministry includes the prioritizing of the various functions in the order of their relative importance: (a) proclamation of the gospel, (b) teaching, (c) evangelism, (d) pastoral care, and (e) ecumenical and interfaith activities.

Ministry Defined

How does one define ministry? Is there a wide sense and a narrow sense in which ministry is defined? What examples do New Testament writings contain that incarnate ministry? Is ministry healing the brokenhearted, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, teaching ethical instructions to the saved, seeking justice for the wronged, ministering to "to the least of these," and so on? Is ministry reserved for a special class known as "clergy" (narrow sense)? Or, is ministry for every Christian (wider sense)? Just what does it mean to minister?

These are questions that one must answer to adequately form a proper conception of one's own ministry with its various models as it is set forth in the Bible. Moltmann cautions Christians about a proper understanding of ministry: "As the messianic congregation the people of God cannot recognize the sovereignty of a priestly caste or special ministerial class."[49] No Christian should surrender his/her freedom, which Christ has brought about, to a select group of men to do his/her ministry or thinking. James A. Wharton has rightly picked up on the meaning of ministry:

> The familiar word "minus" is beneath "minis-try" in whatever sense the term is used. A "lesser" person or persons understood to be somehow "greater." Ministry may describe the service by a courtier to a king, a slave to a master, or a wage earner to an employer out of motives as diverse as loyalty, duty, compulsion, or personal gain.[50]

Proclamation of the Gospel

The word *proclamation*, in and of itself, does not disclose the object of what is proclaimed. One may proclaim the Word of God in its totality, or one may proclaim the good news. The church's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah is in essence the gospel of the kingdom. Moltmann says, "The messianic church grew out of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel and is alive in the act of proclamation."[51] Moltmann includes the following in the proclamation of the gospel: "preaching, teaching, conversations with groups and individuals, storytelling, comforting, encouraging and liberating, through the publicity of the media in the proclamation of the gospel."[52]

It is through the proclamation (κηψρυγμα, khrugma, "message") of the "good news" (ευζαγγελιον, euaggelion, "gospel") of God that individuals are made disciples (μαθητευψσατε, maqhteusate, "make disciples"). Once an individual is called through the message of redemption, then, he/she must be taught to be submissive to the teachings of God (**Matthew 28:18-20**). Mark begins the ministry of Jesus by informing his readers

that Jesus went about "proclaiming (khruvsswn, khrusswn) the good news (eujaggevlion, euaggelion) of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news (ejn tw'/ eujaggelivw, en tw euaggeliw, "in the gospel")!'" (**Mark 1:14-15**). It is in the same vein that Matthew paints a concise picture of Jesus' ministry as "teaching," "preaching," and "healing." Matthew writes: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching (didavskwn, didaskwn) in their synagogues, preaching (khruvsswn, khrusswn) the good news of the kingdom, and healing (qerapeuvwn, qrapeuwn) every disease and sickness among the people" (**Matthew 4:23**).

The followers of Jesus participate in preaching and teaching as a part of their ministry. Even though Christians cannot perform "healing" in the sense that Jesus executed, nevertheless, Christians can assist individuals in their sickness as a part of their *diakonia* (**Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 25:31-46**). As mentioned above, Paul speaks of the "preaching of the gospel" as the "ministry of reconciliation" (diakonivan th'" katallagh'", diakonian ths katallaghs), that is to say, declaring (proclaiming) Jesus as the Word of reconciliation (**2 Corinthians 5:18-21**). In other words, Jesus is God's way of salvation for a lost and dying world. This "ministry of reconciliation" rests upon the shoulders of every believer.

Matthew and Mark begin their ministry of Jesus with the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom, and both men conclude with instruction to continue this ministry of preaching. Mark, for example, gives the final words of Jesus as: "Go (poreuqevnte", poreuqentes) into all the world and preach the good news (khruvxate toV eujaggevlion, khruxate to euaggelion) to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (**Mark 16:15-16**). On the other hand, Matthew phrases the Great Commission with these words:

> Therefore go (poreuqevnte", poreuqentes) and make disciples (maqhteuvsate, maqhteusate) of all nations, baptizing (baptivzonte", baptizontes) them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching (didavskonte", didaskontes) them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (**Matthew 28:19-20**).

Proclamation of the gospel and proclamation of the teachings of Christ are two distinct activities in the Great Commission. This is the reason that preaching is prioritized first and teaching second in one's ministry. Once an individual is called through the message of redemption and placed in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus, then he/she must be taught to be submissive to the teachings of God. There is, so it appears, a distinction between preaching and teaching. Alan Richardson gives this pertinent comment on preaching: "In the NT preaching has nothing to do with the delivery of sermons to the converted, which is what it usually means today, but always concerns the proclamation of the 'good tidings of God' to the non-Christian world."[53]

It is critical that one understands the distinction between preaching the gospel and teaching the Word in order to restore the biblical ideal of preaching. One has to do with birth, the other with spiritual digestion. The Gospel is that which brings us into being while the doctrine is that which is essential to our growth and well being. There is as much difference between Gospel and doctrine as there is between the sperm from which

life comes and the daily bread upon which the child feeds. This understanding is crucial to the fellowship of the saints. This lack of distinction is critical in Church of Christ theology. It is not uncommon for Christians within this religious movement to associate the twenty-seven books that comprise the so-called New Testament as the Gospel. Thus, gospel and doctrine are wedded together. As a result of this merger, then, for one to disagree with the religious leaders is to preach another gospel.

The verb "to preach" frequently has for its object "the gospel." C. H. Dodd, one of the more able scholars, believes that there is a distinction. It is in this regard that he seeks to set forth a correct understanding of what the Gospel is all about. He writes:

> Indeed, the connection of ideas is so close that *keryseein* by itself can be used as a virtual equivalent for *evangelizesthai*, "to evangelize," or "to preach the Gospel." It would not be too much to say that wherever "preaching" is spoken of, it always carries with it the implication of "good tidings" proclaimed.[54]

Also, Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the American Restoration Movement—Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and Churches of Christ—differentiated between "preach" and "teach." For instance, Campbell quotes from Dr. Campbell concerning this difference:

> Dr. Campbell observes—"No moral instructions, or doctrinal explanations, given either by our Lord or his Apostles, are ever, either in the Gospels or the Acts, denominated preaching." Again, he says that the Greek word *kerrusso*, which means to preach, "always implied public notice of some event, either accomplished or about to be accomplished, often accompanied by a warning to do, or forbear something, but it never denoted either a comment on, or explanation of any subject, or a chain of reasoning in proof of a particular sentiment." Thus we find that the preacher's mission is altogether to the world, and that he takes upon himself another office entirely, when he presumes to teach the church.[55]

One more, Alexander Campbell, in an address delivered before the Kentucky Convention, held at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, September 28, 1853, pungently states his thoughts:

> Preaching the gospel and teaching the converts, are as distinct and distinguishable employments as enlisting an army and training it, or as creating a school and teaching it. Unhappily for the church and for the world, this distinction, if at all conceded as legitimate, is obliterated or annulled in almost all Protestant Christendom.[56]

This is no mere speculative distinction. It was appreciated and understood and acted upon in apostolic ministry. For example, Luke records the early ministry this way: "They never stopped teaching (didavskonte", didaskontes) and proclaiming (eujaggelizovmenoi, euaggelizomenoi) the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (**Acts 5:42**). When believers confuse "biblical preaching" and "biblical teaching," division is created among Christians rather than unity. With a proper understanding of the two different functions, this

apprehension will contribute toward a more effective ministry. Victor Furnish captures the essence of preaching when he writes:

> Only when we recognize that Paul's preaching was a *ministerium Dei*, and not just personal religious testimony, are we able to understand how he could rejoice even when Christ was proclaimed for the wrong reasons, but those who acted from unworthy motives and out of pretense (Phil.1:15-18). The word Paul preached was not about what God had done for him; it was a word from God that spoke of what God had done in Christ for all those who believe.[57]

Victor appears to be correct when he says: "In the Pauline understanding of ministry, preaching is an occasion, not just an 'occurrence.'"[58] Again, Victor is right when he says: "In Rom. 10:5-21, Paul describes the gospel as 'the word of faith' which comes 'near' in preaching."[59]

Evangelism

Christians exist to communicate God's Word; Christians are ambassadors for Christ. It is the mission of believers to evangelize the world. As long as there is one person who does not know Christ, the church has a mandate to keep growing. Growth is not optional. It is commanded by Jesus in His great commission (**Matthew 18:20**). Paul, too, expresses this same truth in the Corinthian correspondence when he says: "God. . . gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:18**) and "has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**5:19**) and, again, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (**5:20**). Moltmann points out that:

> The messianic mission of Jesus is only fulfilled in his death and is put into full force through his resurrection. . . . Through his death and resurrection the church participates in his mission, becoming the messianic church of the coming kingdom and man's liberation.[60]

Again, Moltmann is very insightful in his statements concerning the missionary nature of the church in his description of the true nature of the church: "The church understands itself as 'the church of the world'"[61] For instance, according to Moltmann, "It is the vehicle of the gospel of freedom, not a schoolmaster for the nations."[62] In other words, when the church proclaims the gospel of Christ, it is calling men to repentance and to a new start into freedom. Jesus fulfills His mission through the proclamation of the good news of redemption made available through faith in Jesus. Moltmann demonstrates this most impressively with his description of the church:

> It is the community of the liberated, the community of those who are making a new beginning, the community of those who hope. Their fellowship serves to spread the call of freedom in the world and, as new fellowship, should itself be the social form of hope. Fundamentally, all Christians share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and are witnesses of the gospel.[63]

Teaching

Moltmann calls attention to the importance of teaching versus speaking in tongues in the assembly when he writes: "The apostles recognized teaching as one of the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; cf. 1 Cor. 2:13), and he clearly valued it above speaking in tongues when it came to public worship (1 Cor. 14:6)."[64] Teaching involves a "building up" of the body of Christ (**2 Corinthians 10:8**). The Sermon on the Mount is an excellent example of teaching (**Matthew 5—7**). Whether one participates in the preaching of the gospel or the teaching of the Word, it is essential that one understand ministry in its essential aspect—ministry of God. In other words, if one perceives ministry as the service of God and not so much as the service of the world, or of the church, or of individuals, or of society, then one allows God to use him/her in accomplishing His objectives—the salvation of the world. It is ultimately God's ministry, not simply man's ministry. Man is a participant in God's ministry.

Spiritual Development

The Christian community is to be involved in the spiritual development of each individual. Not only is man an instrument of God, but man is also a participant in God's ministry. One must never forget that God allows each person to participate in His ministry. One aspect of teaching is to develop the spiritual maturity of individuals to a commitment to Jesus as God's Son. The spiritual development of Christians is a part of the growth process that the New Testament writers focus on. One classic example is the judgment scene in **Matthew 25** concerning God's judgment upon the nation of Israel for its rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. In this parable against the religious leaders, Jesus speaks of the "least of these." In one's spiritual development, he/she must realize that the "least of these" involve care on the part of all believers. There is some sense in which all Christians are to become involved in pastoral care. James, our Lord's brother, expresses true spirituality this way:

> If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (**James 1:26-27**).

The Hebrews writer also captures the concept of the "least of these" in the following words: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (**Hebrews 13:15-16**). Christians today need encouragement just as much as they did in the first century. It is in this vein that the author of Hebrews exhorts believers not to fail to assemble: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (**10:24-25**). The "Day approaching" refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE as described by Jesus in **Matthew 24**, **Mark 13**, and **Luke 21**.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Activities

Another activity of ministry, as stated earlier, is the ecumenical aspect of ministry

within the body of Christ. For example, Paul in writing to the Ephesians encourages them to work toward "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**). Also, Paul in the beginning of this short epistle expresses God's plan for the unity of His people:

> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (**1:9-10**).

God's people must learn to be *peacemakers* not *piecemakers*. It is in this regard that Professor Leroy Garrett, a reformer in church unity, says,

> The point of the gospel is that now in Christ Jesus "you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). This makes all men in Christ *blood* brothers, irrespective of what garb they wear or what infirmity they bear. It is a blessed reality that Jesus came to make men brothers. This is something far different than merely sharing a space on a church roll. Men become brothers only through an inward experience that transcends them both. [65]

As a part on one's ministry, Christians should work toward breaking down the barriers that separate them from other believers. In this vein, Moltmann states: "The ecumenical movement seeks the visible unity of Christ's church."[66] Again, he rightly insists on looking beyond one's own denomination in defining the true "Church of Christ": "But the question of the 'true church' moves into the foreground. Just as we seek for the true church in the shape of our own denomination, so we will seek it in the forms of other churches as well; for the true church is one and indivisible."[67] Again, he says, "In the ecumenical context Christianity loses its provincial character."[68] Moltmann speaks of the church as one and indivisible. Garrett, too, uses the following pregnant words in his "Catholicity of the Church" article:

> And we should use the term *catholic* much more than we do in our references to the church. *Why I Belong to the Catholic Church* would be a better title for a talk than *Why I Belong to the Church of Christ*, for with that topic one is at once on universal ground, whereas the term "church of Christ," since it has been adopted by several groups as a distinctive name, has one treading the waters of sectarianism.[69]

Thomas Campbell, father of Alexander Campbell, while a Presbyterian wrote the following words about the universal nature of the church: "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures."[70] Campbell is conscious of the causes of divisions within the true church of Christ. He himself seeks to call attention to the "uncharitable divisions among them." Again, he writes:

> That although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in

> particular and distinct societies . . . yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God.[71]

Richard Niebuhr, former Director for The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada, is also to the point when he writes:

> The confusion between part and whole is not to be avoided by denying the reality of the parts but only by the acceptance of diversity and limitation and the corollary recognition that all the parts are equally related in the whole to the ultimate object of the church.[72]

A part of one's ministry is to work toward the unity for which Jesus prayed (**John 17**). One's philosophy of ministry—participatory or instrumentalist—determines one's attitude of unity. In the participatory philosophy of ministry, one participates, but, on the other hand, the extreme instrumentalist philosophy of ministry says, "I am the voice of God."

REALITIES OF THE MODERN WORLD

The Urban Christian

An excellent modern day example of ministry in the "realities of the modern world" is Ray Bakke's book on *The Urban Christian.* In his autobiography of ministry, he states that his purpose in writing *The Urban Christian* is "to indicate something of the big corporate picture within which your personal ministry is situated.[73] In the beginning of his ministry, he established a discipleship group, which took a total of five years for the formation of the first Christians in Action (CIA).[74] This group formed a committee and other neighborhood action committees. As a result of this action, at one time over forty gays and lesbians attended support groups. Their ministry also included hosting an Alcoholics Anonymous Group.[75]

They, according to Bakke, "wanted to be known as people who cared—for the community, for schools, for senior citizens, and so on.[76] Bakke's group adopted training programs to strengthen people under stress, to encourage people experiencing divorce, or to assist those involved in drugs or alcohol.[77] This kind of ministry introduces one into the "realities of the real world." Bakke questioned pastors from all over the world as to the greatest ten basic barriers to effective evangelism. This questionnaire revealed that all barriers could be summed up in the statement: "We never did it that way before!—the Seven Last Words of the Church.[78]

He discovered that hindrances to effective evangelism did not exist in the so-called "big bad city itself," but rather in barriers created by "church politics, policies, priorities or personalities."[79] In other words, failure to evangelize is not in the cities, but in the failure of an individual to interact within his/her own setting. Christian ministry involves participation in the "realities of the real world." One should participate with the congregation of which he/she is a member for an effective ministry. Bakke suggest that

one begin with the question: "How did you come to know Jesus Christ?"[80] This question unlocks the pilgrimage of the individual.

One should share one's personal pilgrimage of faith with others in order to strengthen their faith. A second question put forth by Bakke is: "What were the circumstances of your life when you became a Christian?"[81] This question causes one to reflect upon the faith that has sustained him/her over the years. Then, Bakke ask a third question: "What have you enjoyed in church life over the years?"[82] As a result of this question, individuals recalled things long forgotten. He discovered many prior social activities no longer in practice. Finally, he concluded his interview with this question: "If you could wave a wand and bring about a future for this church, what would it look like?"[83] This final question awoke people to commitment and to future possibilities in their ministry. Bakke's concept of ministry is a functional ministry.

Bakke's ministry included "networking social agencies,"[84] such as: (1) police, (2) schools, (3) welfare agencies, (4) prisons, (5) courts, (6) hospitals, (6) political groups, and (8) offices of city hall.[85] This kind of ministry introduces one to the "realities of the real world." Surely he is correct when he writes: "I part company with those who say, 'Only do a social ministry,' and with those who say, 'We only announce the good news.'"[86]

Another individual, Lester R. Brown, also calls attention to a "social ministry" in his book, *Who Will Feed China?*[87] Even though he did not address this concern with quotations from the bible, nevertheless, food production is one aspect of the Christian community. What can Christians do in this area of food shortages? Brown issues a wake-up call to alert people to the problems in China that could affect the entire globe.[88] As Brown explains, "All the leaders of China today are survivors of the massive famine that occurred in 1959—in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward—a famine that claimed a staggering 30 million lives."[89] Brown seeks to avoid another famine that could affect, not only China, but also the whole world.

Racism in the World

One's attitude toward the race question can have extreme consequences in the development of another's attitude toward Christianity. How should a Christian respond to racism? Should Christians become involved in seeking answers to the problems of racism? Professor James H. Cone says, "Unlike white churches, which separated religion and politics when the racial question was involved, black churches have always viewed them as belonging together, especially in regard to race."[90] Martin Luther King reminded the clergy: "a minister cannot preach the glories of heaven while ignoring social conditions in his own community that cause men an earthly hell."[91] Again, Cone remarks: "There was no way anyone could be the kind of Christian that King's theology called for without being willing to suffer on behalf of the "least of these," a biblical reference he often used to describe the poor."[92]

King correctly understood that God is concerned about every area of one's life,

not just the so-called spiritual aspects confined within the church building, which is usually one, or, at the most, three hours weekly. This ministry of God involves not just proclamation of the Gospel, but also requires involvement in social actions. When Christians sit on the sideline and hope that things will get better, God is not pleased with this insensitivity. Jesus confronts this issue head-on in his "least of these" in **Matthew 25**. God, through Isaiah, complains: "No one calls for justice" (**Isaiah 59:4**).

The religious leaders of Israel did not speak out against injustice. The people as a whole did not speak out against injustice. The Lord looked and was displeased that no one called for justice. Again, Isaiah says, "The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene" (**59:15,16**). God questions Israel by saying that the kind of "fasting" that He is concerned with is: (1) "to loose the chains of injustice," (2) "to set the oppressed free," (3) "to share your food with the hungry," (4) "to provide the poor wanderer with shelter," and (5) "when you see the naked, to clothe him" (**58:6-7**).

As mentioned above, when one's ministry does not consider the "least of these," then, one's testimony about his faith in Jesus is weakened. Malcolm X is a classic example of a weakened ministry among many Christians. Malcolm X, as he was called, rejected Christianity because he did not see Christ in believers in the real world, as Cone makes clear. Cone writes: "Malcolm's opposition to Christianity was not based upon his examination of its creeds and doctrines or the scholarly writings of its theologians. Rather, it was defined by the practices of people who called themselves Christians."[93] What did Jesus say about love? Jesus reminds every believer: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (**John 13:34-35**).

Transcendence and Immanence of God

One's consciousness of God's transcendence (above and independent of the material universe) and immanence will control one's ministry. David Wells develops the evolutionary rearranging of God to nothing in modern society. In other words, according to Wells, God is pushed to the periphery and ceases to be relevant in the lives of men and women.[94] He also calls attention to the "weightlessness of God," that is to say, God ceases to be relevant to the modern context.[95] In order for one to be effective in his/her ministry, one must be conscious of the values in a modern society. In other words, one must distinguish between two concepts—modernization and modernity. What is the difference between these two terms? Wells explains the distinction: "The former is producing changes in the outer fabric of our life; the latter is altering the values and meanings that emerge from within the context of the modernized world—values and meanings that in the modern context seem altogether normal and natural."[96]

He calls Christians back to a realization of the transcendence and immanence of God. In other words, believers need to encompass the *distant* God and the *near* God. One's attitude toward transcendence and immanence affects one's view of the world. There are two opposing perceptions prevalent in the world. One is natural and the other is supernatural. Without a transcendent God, then there can be no objective standard by which man is to determine right from wrong.

One must recapture the focus of "transcendent biblical truth," writes Wells.[97] When one ministers to the world, there must be recognized an objective standard by which things are to be judged; otherwise, there is no hope of ever resolving the question of "right" versus "wrong." In the words of Isaiah, it is: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn" (**Isaiah 8:20**). Why do people refuse the Word of God? Wells states the reason concisely: "Modernity inexorably relocates God to its periphery, rendering him first impotent, then irrelevant, and finally invisible."[98]

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to call attention to two concepts of ministry, namely, instrumentalist and participatory. Christians are invited to participate in God's ministry. This ministry involves "the least of these," as well as the various functions of ministry. Ministry is not reserved for a special class, but for every believer. Each person is to perform whatever gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given to him/her. Christians are concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel as well as with teaching the instructions of God, which includes the social issues. God is as concerned with relationships as He is with the assembling of His people on Sundays. If one does not love individuals, then how can one love God whom he/she has not seen?

An understanding of the church as the company of the redeemed heightens one's perception of the privilege of ministry. There is a sense in which the church is Christ incarnate; in other words, it is the body of Christ. The church is not an ecclesiastical structure; rather, it is an organism. It is the company of the liberated. This proclamation of liberation is the business of every believer. Once Christ sets a person free, then that individual seeks to teach others to be submissive to the whole council of God.

There is no area of life that is not affected by the Christian's call to ministry. A perusal of the prophets reveals involvement in the affliction of widows and orphans; the prophets also addressed the concern of inadequate wages and justice in the courts. Even though there is a separation of church and State, there can never be a separation of God and State anymore than there can be a separation of God and church. Both of these entities are under God's control.

How did you respond to the opening paragraph in this study concerning questions put forth for one's consideration? In conclusion, it is necessary to ask the following questions again: What is your definition of ministry? What is your definition of church? Are you a participant in God's ministry? Are you conscious that you are an instrument of God? Are you concerned about social issues as well as the proclamation of the Gospel? Should Christians be involved in politics? Are you a minister of God?

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[1] T. W. Manson, *The Church’s Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 35.

[2] See Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 11, 19, for an insightful, fully assessed definition of “model.” He writes:

> Models are not jut opinions or theories; they are often the lenses through which we view reality. Models of the kingdom of God can have earth-shaking results. . . . What people believe about the kingdom often shapes what they do. . . . A further word should be added concerning the use of models in theology and specifically in discussing the kingdom of God. A considerable literature on using models in theology has developed over the past three decades, and models are increasingly employed today as a method of theological exploration . . . . ‘A model is, in essence, a sustained and systematic metaphor.’ . . . By constructing and exploring models one finds hints of what may be true about the hidden reality the models represent.

[3] Manson, *The Church’s Ministry*, 16.

[4] See Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1989), 23, where he says,

> The word *paradigm* comes from the Greek. It was originally a scientific term, and is more commonly used today to mean a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference. In the more general sense, it’s the way we ‘see’ the world—not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding, interpreting

[5] Anders Nygren, “Corpus Christi,” in *This Is the Church*, ed. Anders Nygren, Gustaf Aulen, Ragnar Bring, Anton Fridrichsen, and Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), 4.

[6] Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), 42.

[7] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (SanFrancisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1991), 68.

[8] Ibid., 1.

[9] Ibid., 2.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] Ibid., 52.

[12] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

[13] Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit, 54.

[14] Ibid., 55

[15] Ibid., 68.

[16] Ibid., 69.

[17] Rudolph Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 308, 310.

[18] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 105.

[19] Ibid., 106.

[20] Ibid., 121.

[21] Ibid., 122.

[22] Ibid., 124.

[23] Ibid., 252. For Moltmann, the "apostolate" includes proclamation through the Word and sacraments and the Christian community.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 227.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 256.

[29] Ibid., 226.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 227.

[32] Ibid., 226, 227.

[33] Ibid., 242.

[34] Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality: A Focus for Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 77. Even though this comment appears in the context of ministry as "instrumentalist," nevertheless, this statement is an excellent illustration of what is meant by "participatory" ministry.

[35] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 198.

[36] Ibid., 198.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 205.

[39] Ibid., 289.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 150-203.

[43] Campbell, *Pastoral Spirituality*, 44.

[44] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 295.

[45] Ibid., 298.

[46] See Campbell, *Pastoral Spirituality*, 77, for an excellent discussion of this concept of ministry.

[47] See Ibid., 87-90.

[48] Lawrence O. Richards, "Minister/Ministry," in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 433.

[49] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 303.

[50] James A. Wharton, "Theology and Ministry in the Hebrew Scriptures," in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, ed. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Louisville: Westminster, 1981), 19-20.

[51] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 206.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1960), 171-172.

[54] C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching* (New York: Harper & Roe, 1964), 8.

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[57] Victor Paul Furnish, "Theology and Ministry," in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, eds. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 107.

[58] Ibid., 108.

[59] Ibid., 109.

[60] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 83.

[61] Ibid., 84.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid., 85

[64] Ibid.112.

[65] Leroy Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," in *Restoration Review: The Church of Christ Yesterday and Today* 15, no. 3 (March 1973), 45-46.

[66] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 12.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 11.

[69] Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," 44.

[70] Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *Declaration and Address and Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (Pennsylvania, Thomas Campbell, 1809; reprint, St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1975), 44 [page references are to reprint edition].

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[72] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 40-41.

[73] Ray Bakke, *The urban Christian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 124.

[74] Ibid., 96.

[75] Ibid., 98.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., 59.

[79] Ibid., 60.

[80] Ibid., 88.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 89.

[84] Ibid., 114.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 145.

[87] Lester R. Brown, *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995).

[88] Ibid., 16.

[89] Ibid., 17.

[90] James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 143.

[91] Cited in Ibid., 147.

[92] Ibid., 149.

[93] Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 167.

[94] See David Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 118-185 for a detailed explanation of the modern day concept of God.

[95] Ibid., 88.

[96] Ibid., 7.

[97] Ibid., 58.

[98] Ibid., 119.

Jesus' Methodology for Evangelism: GO!

Thrust statement: **Christ's body is to be missionary in purpose and missionary in design.**

Scripture reading: **Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 12:1-3**

As one reflects upon Jesus' final words to His disciples, one observes that the church of our Lord Jesus exists for the sake of the world, not for itself as an institution. The congregation is intended to be missionary in purpose and missionary in design. The church is to have a missionary approach in its outreach. In other words, the church should be structured so that its members are mobile and active in building up each other and moving out into the world to convert people to Jesus. The church today, as a whole, advances a "come" theology rather than a "go" theology. The "come" attitude generally means that the church just waits for people to drop in. But if the people of God expect to win souls to Christ, then it must reevaluate the current philosophy of "four-walls" mentality. It must return to what Jesus taught—go and tell. The title for this message is "Jesus' Methodology for Evangelism: GO!" Christ's strategy for evangelism is found in **Matthew 28:18-20**.

One might almost say that the present-day church is better equipped for every other task than it is for its primary mission of proclaiming the gospel of Christ. When the church is silent, it is not true to its calling. Do not Christians incur guilt when they do not pass on the Gospel they have been entrusted with? The church of Jesus cannot be a true church when it is silent about the good news of God's way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Today, there is a great deal of shyness in speaking about the things of God to a lost and dying world. God's people must work toward breaking down the traditional aloofness that produces a church of silent saints.

CHALLENGE TO ALL BELIEVERS

I would like to present a vigorous challenge to the congregation of Christ at Oakwood Hills to recover the biblical concept of the evangelistic mission. Paul in writing

to the Corinthians reminds them of the their own calling to the ministry:

> 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**).[1]

What is this Scripture saying to you? Are you in Christ? Are you committed to the message of reconciliation? Are you an ambassador of Christ? Are you conscious that God makes His appeal to sinners through His new creation? The church is God's creation. Paul expresses it this way to the Ephesians: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (**Ephesians 2:10**). God is continually working in those who belong to Him. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, cuts away all underbrush when he writes: "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (**Philippians 2:13**).

All Christians are subject to God's Word and are to be committed to His will and to His service. The words of the Chronicler should echo constantly in the minds of God's children: "For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (**2 Chronicles 16:9**). Are you committed to Him? Have you consecrated your life to Him? Are you just playing church? Christians are tempted to negligence, selfishness, pride, self-centeredness, and contentiousness. However, individuals and congregations should never be complacent with their present spiritual level and never satisfied with less than what the Lord desires of His people.

CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRAY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF GOD'S KINGDOM

Are you praying for the advancement of God's kingdom? Are you one of the ones seeking to work the harvest? Are you praying that God will send forth laborers into His vineyard? Matthew mentions an occasion in which Jesus was reaching out to men and women who were harassed and helpless. As he looked upon these individuals, Matthew informs us that His heart was filled with compassion. Listen to Matthew as he captures the tender compassion of Jesus:

> 35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask

the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (**Matthew 9:35-38**).

Are you one of the workers for Jesus? Have you asked the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field? Having said this, one must not depreciate the importance of the congregation. The congregation of God should be so structured that it encourages mobilization of the people to be a gathered people, a group called out form the world to strengthen, encourage, and comfort one another. But, on the other hand, the congregation should also be taught to scatter and go out into the world to confess Christ. There is a divine rhythm—come and scatter.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OVERTONES OF THE "COME STRATEGY"

Whenever a church adopts just the "come" strategy, then the church dies. It is not an either/or proposition. In other words, the Christian community must be a "come and go," that is, a "gather and scatter" fellowship. There is a positive and a negative overtone associated with the "come" philosophy. On the negative side, some Christians are always "coming" but never "going." Another negative of the "come strategy" is when the church opens the door to wait until the people come in, but the members do not go out. Church growth ceases because soul winning is seldom practiced. Christians attend church gatherings regularly, but they are not active in evangelistic outreach. God's people live and work in the community, but they seem completely unaware of their responsibilities for witnessing to those whom they meet daily in the market place.

The negative "wait" and "let come" is the very opposite of what Jesus taught in **Matthew 28:18-29**. The "come" mentality, separated from the "go" mentality on the part of the believer has robbed the church of its effective evangelistic strategy in winning souls to Christ. It is true that once an individual is a Christian, he/she should be encouraged to attend the gatherings of the saints. Yet, for the saints, what is essential to any growth is a "come and go" concept in which Christians come to be strengthened by the preaching of the Gospel and teachings of God's Word and fellowship with other believers in order to "go out" into the world to penetrate the word with the saving message of the Gospel of Christ.

"GO" AND THEN "COME" STRATEGY

Every believer should react toward every sinner with a "go" and then "come" strategy. When sinners are invited to the community of God this way, then the cart follows the horse. But on the other hand, if the church expects the sinner to just drop in without any activity on the part of the believer, then the horse follows the cart. Church work was never intended to be carried out in the church building alone. Today, churches very seldom employ church bells to remind people that it is time to "come to worship," but in an earlier age, the bells rang out to encourage people "to come." On the other hand, the New Testament writers exhort the saints to "go" into the community and the world—go to every creature. Christians "come" in order that they might "go."

This concept of the "go strategy" brings us to the Great Commission that Jesus extended to His disciples. In this well-known Commission, one observes the "go

strategy," not a "come strategy." Listen to Matthew as he leaves his readers with Jesus' final charge to His disciples:

> [18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

The Gospel should keep Christians "on the go" as the people of God, rather than just sitting and slumping in the pews. The Christian assembly should be like a service station; you come to be filled up on high-octane, only to go out to serve. Christians come together to receive encouragement to equip them to go back out into the world to fulfill their mission of sharing God's way of salvation. Just as soldiers do not remain continually in the barracks, so Christians do not remain forever in the church building. Just as football players do not remain in a huddle, so Christians do not remain in the church building. Christians should "come together" in order to "go" to the harvest fields to reach non-Christians in their Jerusalems, their Judeas, their Samarias, their Floridas, and their ends of the earth.

WHY THE FAILURE TO EVANGELIZE?

One reason for a lack of evangelism is a failure to understand clearly what the Gospel of God is all about. If you once get an insight into the greatness of what God has accomplished in the sending of His Son, then there is no way you can keep quiet. You will be like Andrew, Peter's brother. John, in giving us a little insight into the first disciples of Jesus, reports Andrew's response to Jesus:

> [40] Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. [41] The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). [42] And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter) [**John 1:40-47**].

As you read about the story of redemption, do you feel a desire to share your faith with your relatives and friends? The emphasis in this message is that it is wrong for believers not to go after individuals to lead them to the Lord Jesus. There is a sense in which it is "go" for the believer and then "come" for the sinner. Do you remember the story of Philip? When he found out that Jesus is the Messiah promised by the prophets, he went to Nathanael and said "come and see." Christians at Oakwood Hills should "go" and say, "come" and see what is going on at this fellowship of believers. As a whole, people do not just drop in—even though there are exceptions. Many people are just waiting for someone to invite them—waiting for a "come" invitation. The one that Andrew brought to Jesus is the one that spoke on the Day of Pentecost about Christ being the fulfillment of the prophets. Have you ever told anyone, "We have found the Messiah?"

In this same chapter (**John 1**) as stated above, John gives the reaction of another one, whom Jesus called; namely, Philip from the town of Bethsaida. This story is truly amazing, especially with the skepticism of the one called Nathanael. Let's listen in on the conversation:

> 43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." 44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. 45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." 48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." 50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." 51 He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (**John 1:43-51**).

Did you observe that Jesus found Philip and told him to follow Him? Have you found anyone and told him or her to follow Jesus? Are you willing to imitate the Savior of the world? When Philip followed Jesus, Did he stop there? No, he found someone. Are you a Philip? Are you an Andrew? Have you found anyone? Have you told anyone what you know about the One that Moses and the prophets wrote about? This salvation is so great that even the angels of God desired to stoop low and look into. Peter, the one led to the Lord by Andrew, paints a picture of the eagerness of the prophets to know about the time of this salvation, and he also unveils a portrait of the bewilderment of the angels over this salvation. He describes all of this in very concise phraseology:

> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, **searched intently and with the greatest care**, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (**1 Peter 1:8-12**).

CHRISTIANS NEED TO RECAPTURE THE AWESOMENESS OF SALVATION

Do you stand in awe of the awesomeness of this salvation by grace through faith?

The salvation that the prophets "searched intently and with the greatest care" is now a reality. Are you sharing Jesus with your loved ones, with your neighbors, with the people that you work with, with the people that you purchase things from, and so on? What was it like among the early Christians? Luke captures the intensity of feelings when he writes:

> 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to
> the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and
> many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the
> believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their
> possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they
> continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their
> homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and
> enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily
> those who were being saved (**Acts 2:42-47**).

They were "devoted" to the things of God. Are you dedicated to the cause of Christ? Are you committed to the souls of men and women? Do you praise God for your redemption? Is Christianity an everyday thing with you? Do you devote yourselves daily to the things of God? Or is it just a once a week project? One must never forget the missionary efforts of Jesus to tell people about the good news of the kingdom of God. Matthew puts it this way: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**Matthew 4:23**). In the first commission, Jesus sent the twelve out to the nation of Israel. Again, Matthew gives us this charge of Jesus to His disciples:

> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among
> the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep
> of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'
> 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out
> demons. Freely you have received, freely give. 9 Do not take along any gold or
> silver or copper in your belts; 10 take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or
> sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. 11 "Whatever town or
> village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house
> until you leave. 12 As you enter the home, give it your greeting. 13 If the home
> is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you.
> 14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off
> your feet when you leave that home or town (**10:5-14**).

In the first commission, Jesus sends them out to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus says, "as you go." Did everyone receive the message of salvation? No! But many did. Today, many will not receive the good news of God. But, in spite of this rejection, every believer still has a responsibility of going and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. John also gives some information about the rejection and acceptance of some.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world

did not recognize him. [11] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. [12] Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—[13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (**John 1:10-13**).

Again, one must ask himself/herself, Am I sharing the good news about God's way of salvation in Him and by faith in Him? Only in one's acceptance of Jesus can one experience the new birth. Do you really believe what Jesus told Nicodemus about His coming? Listen to Jesus as He explains the nature of salvation:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

This is the heart of the Gospel—redemption in Jesus. Whenever one looks at the Law of God, one can only bow his head and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Paul drives home this point to the Romans:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**Romans 3:19-20**).

What is the good news of God? Immediately following this rather dismal condition of condemnation, he soars into the heavens with God's answer to man's dilemma:

[21] But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—[26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law (**3:21-28**).

How can one be righteous? God's answer: "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (**3:23**). This is what Jesus preached.

Justification and redemption is through Him. This is what Jesus wants His people to proclaim. Peter, at the instigation of the Holy Spirit, went to the house of Cornelius to tell him what to do to be saved. Upon Peter's arrival, he declares the message of salvation:

> 34 Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not
> show favoritism 35 but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do
> what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel,
> telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You
> know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the
> baptism that John preached—38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the
> Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all
> who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. 39 "We are
> witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.
> They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40 but God raised him from the dead
> on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the
> people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and
> drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to
> the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the
> living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who
> believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**Acts 10:34-43**).

CONCLUSION

As stated above, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he reminds them in a nutshell as to the simplicity of the Gospel and of their responsibilities in proclaiming reconciliation to God through Jesus. This sermon—Jesus' Methodology for Evangelism: GO!—began with a citation from Paul's letter to the Corinthians and ends with this same citation. The following verses address the very heart of the Gospel of God revealed to Abraham almost two thousand years before the Logos became flesh:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the
> new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through
> Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling
> the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he
> has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's
> ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore
> you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin
> to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

What is the Gospel? Paul says, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." Yes, that is the good news of God's kingdom—forgiveness of sins in and through Jesus. Christians should never neglect personal witnessing. The Sunday gatherings should be leading families to discuss and act

positively on the matter of one's relationship to Christ—not just going through certain prescribed rituals ordained by the traditions of men. There is nothing wrong with singing, praying, preaching, teaching, giving, and the Lord's Supper, but Christians should be conscious that without godly living all of one's rituals are null and void.

Hopefully, the various questions asked in this message on evangelism will cause every Christian to reflect upon the importance of sharing one's faith. Are you going? Are you telling? Are you inviting? Are you praying? Do you gather in order to scatter? Do you understand the Gospel of God? Do you stand in awe as you reflect upon God's grace? Are you like the angels? Do you intensively yearn for the Anointed One as the prophets did? Are you committed? Are you seeking the kingdom of God? One should search his/her own soul in seeking to answer the above questions. My prayer is that God will assist each of us in the following decision: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. What is God's answer to evangelism? Jesus answers this question in His final admonition to His disciples:

> [18] Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:18-20**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless noted otherwise.

Keeping the Flame Burning

June 28, 1998

Thrust statement: **Every Christian's desire should be to fan the fire of zeal for the Lord.**

Scripture reading: **2 Timothy 1:6; 2:2**

It is with deep sorrow that I close my ministry with this congregation after seventeen years of preaching and teaching. Many in this congregation, since I began my ministry here, have become young men and women. Some are now leaders in this congregation. Many have married and now have small children. Many have become much older in the last seventeen years. I was only forty-seven when I began my ministry here; I now conclude my ministry with Grassy at the age of sixty-four. Time is flying by. I hope that all of us have grown in our understanding of Jesus and what He has accomplished for us in our salvation. I believe that every one has learned a great deal more in skillful handling the written Revelation of God; all of us have grown together. Today, I know a lot more about how to teach the Word of God correctly than I did when I first came here. A few months ago, when I realized that my ministry with Grassy would terminate on June 28, 1998, I decided to write most of my sermons and Bible studies in order to leave some of my teachings from the Holy Scriptures to assist you in your own Bible studies and in your daily walk with God. My prayer is that you will utilize these studies to assist you in doing home Bible studies, in leading others to Christ, and encouraging those already in the faith.

I thank all of you for your spiritual and financial support for the past several years. Hopefully, you have grown in faith during my work with Grassy. I want each of you to know that I love everyone of you and that I will miss all of you very much. Since I do not have the time to discuss what your individual relationships have meant to me for the past seventeen years, I, nevertheless, do want to mention two men in particular. I am especially appreciative for the many insights from the Scriptures that Ancil Farris has shared with me over the years. I think that I am much more mature in my judgment as a result of his

keen understanding of the Word. I also am deeply indebted to Pat Kilpatrick for insisting that I write for his journal (***Ensign***). Prior to writing for his paper, I had written only three articles for other publications. I appreciate the patience that Pat manifested toward me in helping me to learn to write. If it had not been for Pat, I probably would never have started my writing career. As a result of his help, I am now able to reach many people whom I could not have reached otherwise. Since I began my ministry here, I have completed the B.A., M.S., and M. Div. Degrees. Also, I have recently been accepted as a candidate for the doctoral degree.

Before addressing the subject for this morning—"Keeping the Flame Burning."—I wish to briefly reminisce about some of the events that have happened over the years—some sad, some joyful. There have been departures because of hurt feelings, there have been departures because of other circumstances, there have been deaths, there have been baptisms, and there have been marriages. In this congregation, there have been many new comers. Many who no longer meet with Grassy are still some of the most faithful Christians whom I have ever known. Even though the departure of many have been very sad, nevertheless, Grassy continues to fight the good fight of faith. As one looks upon Grassy, one realizes that we all fight the ways of the flesh. We are all sinners saved by grace. Thank God for his grace!

Deaths

Within the last seventeen years, I have witnessed the death of many believers who were members of this local body of Christians, many of whom are buried in the beautiful landscaped cemetery out back. It seems just a short time ago since Mildred Ponder passed away on June 30, 1988; she was 63 at the time of death. We all look forward to seeing Mildred in the ceaseless ages of eternity. Another great saint whom we all still miss very much is Ophelia Stone; she died in 1990 (date of birth: January, 17, 1914). She is now with the Lord. Everyone remembers Wade Cox (date of birth: October 3, 1906), a man who truly loved God. Silas Ponder still says, "Uncle Wade liked this song." Well, it hasn't been that long since Wade went to be with the Lord (September 19, 1995) at the age of 88. All of us remember L. S. Hornsby. He also went home to glory in November 1995 (age 77). The latest one to go to his heavenly home (January 26, 1998) in this congregation was Dude Blackman, who was 70 years old (date of birth: July 10, 1927). Yes, there are many, many more that could be mentioned, but these names illustrate the shortness of life. As one contemplates death, one cannot help but reflect upon the words of Moses:

> [3] You turn men back to dust,
> saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."
> [4] For a thousand years in your sight
> are like a day that has just gone by,
> or like a watch in the night.
> [5] You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
> they are like the new grass of the morning—
> [6] though in the morning it springs up new,
> by evening it is dry and withered.
> [7] We are consumed by your anger
> and terrified by your indignation.
> [8] You have set our iniquities before you,
> our secret sins in the light of your presence.
> [9] All our days pass away under your wrath;

we finish our years with a moan.
10 The length of our days is seventy years—
or eighty, if we have the strength;
yet their span is but trouble
and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away (**Psalms 90:3-10**).

Baptisms

It seems as if it were just a few weeks ago that I baptized Terry Haga and her sister, Tammy Kelly (both were baptized on June 11, 1995). Then, on July 20, 1997, Larue Smith submitted to her Lord in baptism. Also, just recently, we witnessed the baptisms of Tarry Am Kelly (February 22, 1998) and Clay Daniel Scofield (March 1, 1998). There have been many others who have submitted themselves to the Lord in baptism, but this number is adequate to paint a picture of the desire of so many to render their lives to Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Marriages

On the 25th day of June, 1994, I was privileged to perform the marriage ceremony for Scott and Terri Haga. Also, Debbie and Perry Tidwell were married on the 23rd day of August 1997. Both couples are now proud parents. I appreciate both couples inviting me to participate in joining their lives in holy matrimony.

Keeping the Flame Burning

My departing comments are drawn from the words of Paul in his final farewell to Timothy.

> I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 6 **For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.** 7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day (**2 Timothy 1:3-12**).

Paul is here encouraging Timothy to not allow the fire from God in his soul to go out, but rather to fan it into flame. The gift that Timothy received from Paul through his hands must be fanned into zeal. The gift is from God, but Timothy must blow it into a blaze. It is in this same vein that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (**2 Thessalonians 5:19**). Paul employs in this epistle the

same metaphor that he utilized to Timothy. One must always be on his or her safe guard to keep fire in one's life. Jesus, at least on one occasion, applied the figure of fire to His own ministry: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" (**Luke 12:49**).

Timothy is to keep his own fire going. I remember as a young boy, during World War II, that people were singing, "Keep the Home Fires Burning." This is what Timothy is exhorted to do. This is what I am encouraging each of you to continue to do. Keep the fires burning for the Lord in your souls. Keep the desire burning for the souls of men and women and boys and girls. Many of you are here today because of godly parents, godly grandparents, godly uncles, godly aunts, and so on. Many of you have a rich heritage in the Christian faith even as Paul the apostle also had a rich heritage. Paul could write: "What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? so am I." (**2 Corinthians 11:21-22**).

Paul also reminded Timothy of his pious heritage: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (**2 Timothy 1:5**). Timothy's tears for Paul (**1:4**) reminded Paul of the two women who shaped Timothy's training. Nevertheless, in spite of your Christian training, every Christian must still remind himself or herself that genuine faith, such as Timothy had, is a personal matter and not a mere matter of inheritance. It is in this same vein that John the Baptist had to remind the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism against saying within themselves: "We have Abraham as our father" (**Matthew 3:9**). There must be personal change within us all. Every Christian is to produce fruit within his or her own life. There must be obedience to the commandments of God in your own life (**Matthew 5:18-20; 7:21-27**).

My prayer is that you will seek to capture the passion, the emotion, and the enthusiasm that Paul writes about in his letter to Rome: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (**Romans 12:11-13**). It is also my aspiration to not allow my enthusiasm to burn low for the Lord's kingdom. Do you remember Jesus' letter to the Christians in Laodicea?

> These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth (**Revelation 3:14-16**).

How many of you remember the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about seeking the kingdom? Do you recall how he said to His disciples: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (**Matthew 6:33**). Are you seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Has your conversion changed your life? Are you grateful for what God has done for you? Are you grateful that God has called you into His service? Paul could write Timothy about his salvation in these soul searching words: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service" (**1 Timothy 1:12**). Have you thanked God for your redemption from condemnation? When Jesus seized Paul on the Damascus Road, Paul turned his life around:

> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining

toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 3:12-14**).

Conclusion

Have you turned your life around for God's service? In concluding my remarks today, may I remind each of you, as I also remind myself, of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Preached:

Grassy Church of Christ
Arab, AL
June 28, 1998

Ministers of Reconciliation

By Dallas Burdette April 18, 1998

Thrust Statement: **Every Christian is a minister of reconciliation.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Corinthians 5:19-20.**[1]

Are you a minister of God? How do you answer this question? Is the minister simply someone who stands in the pulpit on a weekly basis to expound the Word of God? Are Christians in general ministers of God? Do you pray that God will send forth laborers into His Harvest? Are you one of the laborers? Or do you expect God to send someone else? Do you feel a responsibility of making known the gospel of Christ and winning others to Him? Just how do you respond to these questions?

It is my desire to present a healthy challenge to you to reclaim the evangelistic vision of the early church and embark afresh on winning others to Him. To do this, one must recapture the urgency of proclamation, that is to say, the sharing of God's way of salvation in Jesus, the savior of the world. Are you a silent Christian? Is there shyness on your part about speaking to others about the love of God? If the gospel is the good news of God, Do we incur guilt if we do not pass it on? Are you a silent saint? Is this a silent church? Is this silence guilty silence? How can people believe in Jesus if they do not hear about Him? It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Christians in Rome.

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? **And how can they believe in the**

> **one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?** And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (**Romans 14:8-15**).

In this context, Paul poses the question of how can one believe in Him if he or she has not heard about Him. This faith in Jesus comes through the proclamation of the good news about God's method of justification for sinful man. Are you talkative about salvation? Some people seldom stop talking. One wonders why it is that when salvation is the subject that many dry up in their conversation. Does our silence betray our lack of Christian assurance and excitement? Have we forgotten Paul's words to the Corinthians about the ministry of reconciliation? It is well to listen to the words of Paul.

> If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, **who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us**. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

Obedience and Love

What is it that causes a Christian to be active in evangelistic witness? One such cause is undoubtedly related to obedience to God. Every Christian is to glorify God in his body. It is in this train of thought that Paul writes: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (**1 Corinthians 6:19-20**). In seeking to do the will of Christ, we are not at liberty to pick and choose His commandments. Again, Paul says, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain**" (1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Thus, we are not to overlook the last words of our Lord in His instructions to make disciples of all nations: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**Matthew 28:19-20**). It was the vocation of Christ to bear witness to the truth; it is our vocation to bear witness to Him. The first incentive for evangelism is loving obedience to God and His Christ, and the second is loving concern for men. Are we sharing with our neighbors the "bread from heaven" (**John 6:32**). In this same speech, our Lord declares: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (**John 6:35**). Do we believe this? Have we forgotten the words of Jesus: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (**John 3:36**).

Are you ashamed of the gospel? Have you reached the stage in which you are embarrassed when talking about Him? Paul could write to Rome and say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (**Romans 1:16**). Why was Paul not ashamed? Listen once more to his penetrating words: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith" (**1:17**). Again, listen to Paul as he takes wings to the heights of heaven

as he describes the gospel in a nutshell:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (**Romans 3:21-24**).

Evangelism

Evangelism is never to be thought of as the task of a select few. Every Christian should practice what Andrew did when he found out about the Messiah. John writes, "Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (**John 1:40-42**). John also records another incident of someone sharing Jesus; this one was Philip. Jesus found him and said follow me. And, as a result of this call, he, in like manner, "found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph'" (**John 1:45**). One cannot help but recall the words of Michael the archangel to Daniel:

> There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. **Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever** (**Daniel 12:1-3**).

The Work of Sunday School Teachers

Do not ever forget that you are the channel of imparting a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Bring your classes together and pray for conversions. Don't ever say that that boy or girl is too small or too insignificant. If you bring that boy or that girl to Christ, what a reformation we could have. There may be a Luther, a Wesley, a Bunyan, a Billy Sunday, a Billy Graham, or an Alexander Campbell. Today, I want to share with you a number of conversions mentioned by Dwight L. Moody in his sermon "The Reward of the Faithful."[2] I share these stories in order to help you see the importance of your own personal ministry in leading souls to Christ.

First, Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) related the story of a teacher in southern Illinois, who taught her little girl to love the Savior. The teacher asked the young girl to get her father to come to Sunday school. This father was a swearing and drinking man; the love of God was not in his heart. But through the teacher's insistence, the little girl told her father about Jesus' love for him. This man came and accepted Christ. Before long, he had been instrumental in founding over seven hundred and eight Sunday schools in southern Illinois.[3]

The Work of a Young Man

Second, Moody relates another story about a man whom he met in New York. At the time of this meeting, the man was a very diligent worker for the cause of Christ. Moody asked him to tell him about

his experience. This man told Moody that he had been a drunkard for over twenty years. His parents had forsaken him; his wife divorced him and married someone else. One day he went into an attorney's office, stoned out of his mind. He told the attorney what a sinner he was. He said, "I must be pretty low when my father and mother, my wife and kindred, cast me off, and there is no hope for me here or hereafter."[4] But the attorney proved a true Samaritan—he told him about Jesus and about salvation. He guided his face toward Zion, the city of God. This man became a leader of a young men's meeting in New York.

Again, Moody also told another incident that occurred during one of his revival meetings. A young man in New York got up and told his experience. He said, "Nine months ago a Christian came to my house and told me that he wanted me to become a Christian. He pointed out the error of my ways, for I had been a hard drinker. I became converted and have not touched a drop of liquor since. If any one had asked who the most hopeless man in New York was, they would have pointed to me." Moody says that at the time this man gave his testimony he was the superintendent of a Sunday school[5].

Lady in London

Finally, he tells about a mother in London who had traveled from Dundee to London, five hundred miles, just to ask Moody to pray for her boys. Later in London, she attended a meeting conducted by Moody. She was accompanied by only one of her boys—the other had died. This woman was a woman of wealth. She gave up her beautiful home and resided near the Agricultural Hall in order to be available to counsel those seeking the Lord. Toward the close of the meeting, she sent a letter to Moody. The letter, in part, reads:

> My husband and I have sought as our greatest privilege to take unconverted friends one by one to the Agricultural Hall, and I thank God that, with a single exception, those brought under the preaching from your lips have accepted Christ as their Savior, and are rejoicing in His love.[6]

Moody says that when he left London, she had the names of 150 who had accepted Christ from her. Moody went on to say, "If we had a thousand such mothers in Chicago we would lift it.

CLOSE

Today, I encourage you to take ten minutes to talk with someone about Jesus. Ten minutes for Christ every day will bring forth laborers into the harvest. Why not be like Andrew and bring your relative or relatives to Christ. Why not be like Philip and find a Nathanael and tell him about the Messiah. Remember that we are all ambassadors for God's kingdom. Remember that Jesus "has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (**2 Corinthians 5:19-21**).

Preached:

Grassy Church of Christ, Arab, AL

April 26, 1998
11 am

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.
[2] Dwight L. Moody, "The Reward of the Faithful," in ***A Heritage of Great Evangelical Teaching*** (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1996), 946-952.
[3] Ibid., 948.
[4] Ibid., 949.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 951.

Opposition: An Opportunity to Witness for Christ

Thrust Statement: **One's spiritual opposition is his spiritual opportunity to advance the cause of Christ.**

Scripture Reading: **John 11:9; 1 Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5**

As one faces opposition—verbal abuse or physical abuse—one must not lose heart and forsake Christ (**Hebrews 12:1-3**). Unfriendliness, as in the days of Christ and the apostles, is not a phenomenon that belongs only to the modern world. Even today, some Christians still practice opposition against other Christians, especially when it comes to preaching grace. But opposition comes in many different colors, particularly when some believers have a grievance or axe to grind, whether justified are not. Many Christians label other Christians with various epithets in order to dampen the influence of another. In the face of hostilities—mental or physical—one can still use the opportunity to win others to Jesus or to strengthen those already in Jesus (see **Philippians 2:12-18**).

How should one react to opposition? There is no "pat" answer to how one should respond in every situation. It all depends on the circumstances surrounding the unfriendliness. This message centers around three major Scriptures in order to try to see how Jesus and Paul dwelt with opposition in a positive manner—**John 11:1-19, 1 Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Timothy 4:1-5**. As one examines the story of Jesus' resurrection powers upon Lazarus, one sees how Jesus, in the face of conflict, took advantage of the situation in order to lead others to faith in Him. In other words, antagonism, in this case, to Christ meant an open door to do the will of God.

As one seeks to understand what the written Revelation of God meant to the original hearers and readers, one also searches for a present day application to his or her own life. One can analyze the various Scriptures in which opposition occurs in order to try to make a determination as to how one should act under certain circumstances. For instance, there may be times when one must flee. Yet, at other times, one may utilize dispute as an open door to reach out to others. Again, it all depends on the circumstances.

This essay develops more of the positive reaction to opposition as an open door in order to reach out to the nonconforming rather than the negative—leaving or fleeing.

Are you willing to use resistance as an opportunity to reach out to those who do not know the Messiah? How one behaves toward someone else can also determine the influence one has in his/her own environment. Christians should never allow their conduct to infringe upon their testimony about the Gospel of Christ and its life changing qualities. Paul's words to the Philippians deals with outward circumstances and one's external behavior to opposition. He writes:

> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel [28] without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. [29] For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, [30] since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (**Philippians 1:27-30**).

Following this terse statement about one's conduct in the face of opposition, Paul immediately calls to the attention of the Christians at Philippi the mind of Christ by saying: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (**2:5**). How did Jesus deal with the individuals crucifying Him? Listen to the words of Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**). Also, one should reflect upon Paul's incarceration as an example of how to use unwanted circumstances as a means to open the door to others for Christ. Paul's imprisonment in Rome is a classic case in point of how one ought to use confrontation as an occasion to win others to Jesus. How do you react toward unkind acts? How do you react toward someone that has done you wrong? One can talk a good case of Christianity, but when someone does you wrong, do you forget every Christian virtue in your relationship to that person. Does the opposition party detect ungodly anger in your voice? Do you use language that is not becoming for a believer? Or do you speak words that are seasoned with grace (**Colossians 4:6**)? One should remember the words of Jesus when one confronts struggle:

> [43] "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor [a] and hate your enemy.' [44] But I tell you: Love your enemies [b] and pray for those who persecute you, [45] that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [46] If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? [48] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (**Matthew 5:43-48**).

Today, all conflict within the body of Christ is not as a result of preaching the Gospel. Even thought Paul experienced most of his disagreement through preaching the Gospel of God's grace, nevertheless, he still experienced skirmishes in other areas. For

example the clash between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark resulted in separate missionary activities (**Acts 15:36-41**). But if the battle results directly from one's stance concerning the truth of the Gospel (salvation by grace versus salvation by works—see **Galatians 3:1-14**), one should remember that he/she is a minister of Jesus Christ. In this role of priestly function, everyone is obligated to uphold the Gospel at all cost. One cannot compromise the Gospel (**1:4-9**).

If one suffers persecution, does this mean that one is not faithful to God? No! If Jesus suffered rejection, is it too much to believe that His disciples too will experience the same treatment from well-meaning individuals? Christians are not immune from difficulties in life from the world or from other sincere Christians. Listen to Jesus as he cautions His twelve apostles:

> A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. [25] It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! (**Matthew 10:24-25**).[1]

Christians frequently suffer from the actions of the members of their own local congregation as well as ostracism from members of other congregations—local or nationwide. Again, do you consider animosity from other Christians as an open door to teach them about the love of God? Often times, problems arise among members over small matters, not because of doctrinal disagreements, but personalities. In other words, the lack of love is the cause of much division. It is not uncommon for believers to leave a congregation for the slightest infraction—something said or done that they do not particularly like. It is then that these disgruntled members begin to look for flaws in someone else's behavior—though not necessarily unethical—in order to justify their not loving their brother or sister in Christ, in spite of John's warning: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness" (**1 John 2:9**). This is not to say that every person who stops work with one congregation and starts work with another fellowship hates his brother or sister in the Lord. Sometimes, individuals feel that they can do more for Christ in another congregation.

Even though most Christians have read or heard someone call attention to the Sermon on the Mount, nevertheless, many fail to hear Christ's instructions concerning one's behavior toward one that he or she has offended. The reaction of many Christians is not reconciliation, but rather separation. The response is: I will just meet with another church. Thus, the issues of disharmony are never resolved. The sun continuously goes down upon their anger. If one cannot love his brother or sister whom he has seen, how can one love God whom he has not seen (see **1 John 4:19-21**)? Listen to Jesus' reaction to a problem that separates one individual from another:

> Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift (**5:23-24**).

Once more, do you consider opposition as an opportunity to witness for Christ?

How have you reacted to this instruction from the Lord? One can hardly read this admonition from Jesus without reflecting upon the words of Paul to the Ephesians: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**). Yet again, Paul writes: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (**4:32**). Christians should try to work out their problems, not divide. This spirit of toleration is the general principle to be adhered to (**Ephesians 4:32, Romans 16:17**), but, in some circumstances, the persecution by certain Christians is so intimidating that one has no recourse but to leave, which, too, is a biblical stance. Paul too encountered such resentment that, in some circumstances, he frequently had to leave and go to individuals that were more perceptive to the truths of the Gospel of Christ (**Acts 18:5-8**). Nevertheless, he used aggression as an opportunity to reach more people for Jesus.

Sometimes Christians are so implacable that one cannot reason with them. Many religious leaders in Paul's day were so cold-hearted that he had to begin his ministry with Gentiles who were more perceptive to the Gospel of Christ (**17:1-9**). When one encounters this kind of performance, one needs to learn how to conduct oneself when one receives resistance in his/her daily walk with God. Some disagreement is so unpleasant that believers have no choice but to leave the fellowship that he/she has been associated with for many years. This author (Dallas Burdette) stayed with the one-cup and Sunday school movement for seventeen years, but the hostilities became so great that leaving rather than staying could do more good for the cause of Christ. Jesus and the apostles all experienced this type of behavior from the religious leaders and the people. Frequently, leaders in control will not allow anyone to participate in the congregation who refuses to adhere to the traditions of the local congregation. They are castigated, they are ostracized, and they are vilified as rebels. Sometimes one has to leave in order to serve God more effectively in soul winning and for his/her own spiritual sanity. In the first commission, Jesus issues a warning about rejection:

> Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. [12] As you enter the home, give it your greeting. [13] If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. [14] If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town (**Matthew 10:11-14**).

When one experiences battle from Christians as Jesus and the apostles received, one frequently has to go where he or she can do the most good for the cause of Christ (see **Acts 18:6**). One's walk with God proceeds from its strong assurance that God is still in control; one is not guaranteed immunity from open aggressions and insidious hostilities and unfounded allegations about one's motives from other believers. One of the remarkable things about Christianity is not that it believes in spite of the historical evidence, but rather it proceeds in spite of its opposition—"The gates of Hades will not overcome it" (**Matthew 16:18**). Having said this, one still needs to learn how to conduct himself/herself so that the interests of God's kingdom are promoted. How one conducts oneself affects, not only oneself, but also the interest of Christ's members. One can hardly ponder proper Christian conduct without thinking about Jesus' prayer to the Father:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (**John 17:20-21**).

There is a sense in which war should cease and desist within the body of Christ, especially over trivial things. It is in this same vein that Paul warns the Galatians: "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (**Galatians 5:15**). Christians should learn to "serve one another" (**5:13**). Why? Listen once again to Paul's reasoning: "The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (**5:14**). But, on the other hand, if one undermines the Gospel of Christ, then one cannot compromise in this area (**2:5, 11-21**). Jesus is the exemplar for one's reaction to turn opposition into an opportunity for witnessing about Christ. The story of Christ's journey to Bethany is a classic example of how Jesus turned opposition into an opportunity to cause individuals to believe in Him.

Christ Journeys to Bethany

As mentioned earlier, this story about Jesus' journey to Bethany is one that is well known (**John 11:1-16**). This story details how Jesus took advantage of an opportunity to glorify God, in spite of apposition. Hopefully, from this story, one can also make application to his/her own life in seeking to make the best of any opposition that may confront one. Even though the scenario is different for the believer today, nevertheless, one can still draw conclusions based upon the historical circumstances surrounding this encounter of Jesus with Martha and Mary and Lazarus. At an earlier time, Jesus had escaped the clutches of the Jews and traveled East of the Jordan, a place where John the Baptist had baptized in his ministry (**10:38-42**). While in this place, Jesus received word from Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, that Lazarus was sick (**11:1-3**). Upon hearing the news, Jesus waited another two days before making the trip to Bethany (**11:6-7**). Before leaving, the disciples questioned the wisdom of Jesus in going back into the territory where the Jews had just a short time ago tried to stone Him (**11:8**). Whereupon, Jesus gave to the disciples one of the now most cited Scriptures within the Christian community:

> Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. [10] It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light (**11:9**).

Jesus did not refuse to go to Bethany in the face of opposition. Rather, He chose to go to this small town in order that His disciples might believe (**11:14**) and bring glory to God (**11:46**). On the surface, Jesus is simply telling His disciples that a man will not stumble in the day; yet, He too is saying that a man must finish his work while it is day. Even in the face of death, one must not back down. Jesus went to Bethany in order that He might call attention to Himself as the Resurrection and the Life (**11:25**). What looks like opposition from the Jews is still an opportunity to serve the will of God, which in this case brings about faith on the part of many (**11:45**). Jesus went to the tomb and requested that the stone be rolled away (**11:38-39**). Even though Lazarus had been dead for four days (**11:39**), He then told the two sisters that He had informed them earlier that if they believed they would see the glory of God (**11:40**). It is at this point that Jesus prays to the

Father:

> Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. [42] I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (**11:41-42**).

Jesus is giving an illustration to His twelve disciples that what often appears as opposition is in reality an open door for service to the will of God. He is giving them an example that they too might follow in His steps when they, too, are faced with what appears to be insurmountable opposition. He wants them to learn how to look animosity in the face and survive. He wants them to look beyond the outward circumstances to the hand of God. It is in this vein that Paul encourages the Philippians, in spite of persecution, to remember that God was working in them (**Philippians 2:12-13**).

Paul Journey to Ephesus

Paul, while in Ephesus, wrote to the Corinthians about his work in Ephesus (**1 Corinthians 16:5-8**). In this Epistle, Paul encountered battle, but, in spite of resistance, he tells the saints at Corinth: "But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, [9] because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" (**16:5-8**). Even though he met hostility from many, nevertheless, he still considered a door having been opened to him to preach Christ and Him crucified. Surely Paul was familiar with the words spoken by the Lord in a vision to Ananias: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. [16] I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (**Acts 9:15-16**).[2]

One must look beyond outward circumstances to the ultimate good that may come from one's efforts to promote the kingdom of God. In other words, one must keep his/her eyes on heaven, not earthly comfort. Paul refused to allow the riot in Ephesus to deter him from proclaiming that there is only one God (**Acts 19:23-41**). Demetrius, a maker of silver shrines for the so-called god Artemis, created an uproar over the loss of revenue as a result of Paul' preaching. Opposition was no new thing for Paul. He had experienced opposition on his first missionary journey that would have caused the average individual to throw in the towel, but not Paul. He refused to allow dissension to hinder his preaching God's grace. He fought to make inroads into the kingdom of darkness in order that the light of the kingdom of God could advance. He did not seek safety and peace for his own protection, but rather he sought the peace that passes all understanding—peace with God.

All Christians want peace, but not peace at the expense of the Gospel of God. One cannot always sidestep opposition, even as Paul did not sidestep the issue of justification when Peter played the hypocrite (**Galatians 2:11-21**). When the Gospel is at stake, one must be willing to enter combat. Are you willing to give yourself whole-heartedly to the Gospel in spite of adversarial opponents—individuals who advance salvation by works rather than by faith alone? Christians must not quench the Holy Spirit in their standing up for salvation by grace. One should never allow anger from the opposing party to dampen one's spiritual vigor or embitter one's soul. One should always feel the way Paul expresses himself to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ

and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (**Galatians 2:20**).

Paul's Admonition to Timothy

Paul writes words of encouragement to Timothy in order that Timothy might preach the Word in spite of opposition from opponents. He did not want this young preacher to allow confrontation to keep him from spreading the Gospel and right behavior. He writes:

> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: [2] Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. [3] For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. [4] They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. [5] But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (**2 Timothy 4:1-5**).

Paul's final words to Timothy are not a comforting message; it is a message about individuals who will not put up with healthy teaching (**4:3**). Many will turn from the word about Jesus and turn to myths (**4:4**). Yet, in spite of this warning, Timothy was told to "keep his head" and to do the "work of an evangelist" and to perform properly his "duties" of Christian ministry (**4:5**). All Christians should always bear in mind that God is still working in them in spite of persecution (**Philippians 2:12-13**). The place of Christian witness is often a difficult and an isolated ministry.

CONCLUSION

When one engages in Christian warfare, one is immediately confronted with the reality that Christian witness is hard and lonely. One may experience opposition from one's own spouse or close relatives in his/her endeavors to promote Christianity or in his/her desire to serve the Lord. This author (Dallas Burdette) recently baptized a woman who received tremendous antagonism from her husband about her conversion to Christianity. Christians should look upon struggle as an open door of opportunity to witness for Christ. The question presented by Paul to the Romans sums up beautifully the mindset of resistance from outside sources that Christians can still find comfort in: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword" (**Romans 8:35**)? Once more he says with gusto: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (**8:37**).

[1]All Scripture citations are from *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2]*The Holy Bible : New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

The Redemptive Society: The Necessity of Commitment

Thrust Statement: **God wants His people to believe "in" Jesus, not just about Him.**

Scripture Reading: **Revelation 3:14-21**

INTRODUCTION

As one reflects upon his/her own commitment to the Lord Jesus, one cannot help but wonder how much commitment there is on the part of each individual who makes up the redemptive society of God. Are you dedicated to the redemptive fellowship of God? Is there loyalty on your part to the fellowship of the concerned? Is there allegiance to the weightier matters of God's Word? Is there devotion to the teachings of God in your daily walk with Him? Is there allegiance to winning souls to Jesus? Is there faithfulness to meet with the saints weekly? Is there commitment to study the Word of God daily? What does the word commitment mean to you? Hopefully, commitment means assuming responsibility in your walk with God.

If one is responsible, then one is loyal, faithful, firm, steadfast, dependable, stable, and so on. If the kingdom of Christ on earth is to progress, one must of necessity be committed to Jesus as both Lord and God. But this commitment also involves genuine concern for the redemptive society ordained by God to operate in the ordinary society of humanity. One cannot shun the church, as many do, with impunity from God's wrath. The church is a part of the fabric of God's children. In the words of Lloyd-Jones: "Wherever He reigns there is His kingdom, and the Church is one of the external manifestations of it. He rules, He reigns in the Church in the hearts of His people in this spiritual sense."[1]

GROWTH IN SPIRITUAL MATURITY:

GOD'S FELLOWSHIP

Just a casual glance over one's relationship with God quickly reveals that unless there is a relevant faith, that is to say, a faith that is active in spiritual activities associated

with the people of God, then faith will not survive. One cannot live his or her life in a vacuum from other believers.[2] Not only must faith be intellectual, it must also be a self-conscious faith that is exercised within a specific group of people, namely, God's church or community of saints. In order for one to grow to maturity, one needs the spirit and fellowship of other believers. One's spiritual life cannot be maintained in isolation from God's fellowship.

Many do not see the relevance of the church in the twenty-first century. The church frequently comes under attack from those within and from those without. Yet, in spite of all its shortcomings—blemishes, divisions, and failures—the church is still the best hope for spiritual strength. Even though today's church lacks a lot in its role within society, life without the church would be much worse. Is the church a necessity in your life? Has the church lost its saltiness? Is the church a light to the world? What does the church mean to you? Do you measure the success of the church by the crowds? Do you determine the victory of the church by how powerful the preacher is in his delivery of God's Word? Do you gauge the triumph of the church by its building program(s)? It is not uncommon for believers to forsake, or abandon, the assembly because the church does not always measure up to perfection in their eyes.

What is the church? Is it the building or the people? Do you place more emphasis upon the building of brick and mortar than you do upon the redemptive society created by God through Jesus Christ our Lord? In today's society, it is not uncommon for Christians to speak of the church as the building. Are you guilty of idolatry of the church building? It is not the building that matters, but rather, it is the real vitality manifested in the lives of God's people that really counts. Just a brief reflection upon the ancient religions in Greece reveals that even though the temples survived for a long time, the real strength of their religions had departed. One still witnesses this same phenomenon in many fellowships today. Christians go through their rituals of five acts on Sunday morning, but, at the same time, one witnesses that the genuine liveliness of the Christian life has deceased. They are no longer an active redemptive society of committed ones to Jesus Christ. They are no longer evangelists for the proclamation of Jesus as God's Good News of salvation.

One could say as Paul said to the Athenians: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious" (**Acts 17:22**).[3] Are you very religious? Are you keeping up an outward show of Christianity? Are you dead in your devotion to the things of God? With the Athenians, their religion died in spite of religious observances by its adherents in their temples. Why? One obvious reason is that it could not meet the test of social relevance and intellectual validity in the worship of their Gods. Men and women were still groaning under the burdens of sin and longing for some hitherto remedy that would be adequate to the wants of their entire nature.

On the other hand, Christianity conquered the heathen religions because of the new vitality and social relevance that stemmed from the life of Christ, along with His teachings and His death, and His resurrection from the grave. Without Christ there was/is no hope. Without Christ there was/is the sting of death. Without Christ there was/is no optimism for life beyond the grave. Through identification with Christ, one could/can say with excitement: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting" (**1 Corinthians 15:55**)? Can you say this? Has Christ made a difference in your life? If you are still groaning under the burden of sin, Jesus is the answer to all your problems.

ZEAL FOR GOD OR DULL CONFORMITY?

Are you zealous for the things of God? Are you seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness in your life? Or are you seeking first your pleasures? One of the greatest dangers facing the church today is dull conformity. In other words, the Christian church is neither cold nor hot in its zeal for the salvation of souls or for good works that will bring glory and honor to God. One can say that the church is halfhearted in its level of concern for the things of God. Lukewarmness is not something new within the fellowship of God. Jesus, in His letter to the church located in Asia Minor (Laodicea), warned the church of its indifference to the things of God:

> These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (**Revelation 3:14-21**).

As you transfer yourself mentally back into the first century, how do you interpret this letter to Laodicea into the twenty-first century? Christians frequently fall into wishy-washy attitudes of negligence about the things of God because of the overwhelming pressures to conform to the status quo surrounding them in their walk with God. They become a part of Protestant Christianity that no longer directs the patterns of life for fruitfulness. It is not uncommon for Christians to relinquish their responsibilities and to lose their individuality in Christian service.

THE CHURCH: INSTITUTIONALISM OR ORGANISM?

Many Christians, so it seems, think that if they meet on Sunday morning for the gathering of the saints, then they have completed their duty to God for the week. Numerous Christians have forgotten they are ministers of reconciliation, not just the pulpit minister. Numerous Christians hand over their Christian duties to a select few. Creg Ogden correctly analyzes the modern day church: "The experience of worship in an institutional framework is something done to you, in front of you, or for you, but not by you."[4] As a whole, at least for many Christians, the church has lost its sense of missions—salt and light in a decaying world.

It appears that today's church has accommodated herself to the cultural climate of the fifteenth century of priest and clergy of a select few. In other words, the church is no longer changing society, but it is being changed by the current culture of the modern

church. The church needs to move from the concept of the church as an institution to the concept of the church as an organism. Again, Ogden is on target when he writes that there is a need for revamping one's concept of the church from an organization to the church as an organism.[5] He expresses his thoughts about the upside down view of the church with clarity. He cogently calls attention to the upside down view of the church as wreaking havoc within the Christian concept of outreach. He writes: "The ministry of the church defined from the top-down viewpoint of its official leaders as opposed to the bottom-up perspective of God's people."[6] In other words, Ogden accurately points out that the church today is, in one sense, an institution that has been institutionalized.

According to Robert Raines, the modern church is seeking to enable people to live with resolution in a world without resolution, that is to say, purpose without purpose.[7] Just what does he mean by "purpose without purpose"? It appears that he is saying that Christians as a whole are just spectators on Sunday mornings—that's all. The average fellowship has little sense of individual mission in the world as ministers of God. Ministry is left for just a few select individuals known as priests, reverends, clergymen, or preachers. If someone were to ask you if you are a member of a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (**1 Peter 2:9**), how would you respond? Would you say, "I am a member of the Baptist Church"? Or would you say, "I am a member of the Church of Christ"? Or would you say, "I am a member of Tom Jones' Church"? Do you really understand that you belong to the chosen people? Do you comprehend that you are a part of the royal priesthood? As a member of this "chosen people," do you grasp that you belong to a holy nation? Have you lost your sense of urgency for the salvation of men and women?

Do you really believe the words of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount as He speaks about salt and light concerning His disciples? Listen once more to His penetrating words about His people and society:

> You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (**Matthew 5:13-16**).

One must not shrink from personal witness. God wants His people to bear fruit. As one reflects upon the Sermon on the Mount, one cannot help but recall the words of Jesus to the Twelve: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (**John 15:16**). Even though these words were spoken to the Twelve, God expects every believer to bear fruit. Just as the apostles were chosen, so God has chosen those who respond to the Good News to bear fruit to His glory (**Ephesians 2:8-10**). Christians are to live lives worthy of God's calling (**4:1-3**). To some extent, it appears that the church, as a whole, has lost its sense of vocation. Christians are called to be agents of reconciliation. Paul expresses this concept in his second letter to Corinth: "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). Even though Paul speaks of himself and his co-workers in this context, yet all Christians are to

proclaim the Gospel message.

The idea of outreach is commonly assigned to the so-called pulpit minister. Through the lens of the institution, one observes two ministries—clergy and laity. Church signs and church bulletins betray this dichotomy—"reverend," "The Very Reverend," "The Most Reverend," and so on. It is not uncommon for churches to give titles to their pulpit ministers in order to set them apart from the laity, or secular members of the congregation. On the other hand, if Christians are ministers of reconciliation, then there needs to be a revamping of the concept of ministry. It is in this vein that Raines says, "We lose our individual concern in corporate irresponsibility."[8] Because of this upside down view of the church, many Christians do not become involved.

Within the congregation there is the "segregation of concern" for ministry. Even though there are different gifts exercised within the Christian ministry, all Christians are ministers. Every Christians is called of God to be a faithful priest (**1 Peter 2:9**). Again, do you have a sense of mission to the lost? If you are going to reach out to the lost, there must be a change in yourself. Yes, there must be a change in your ethical behavior. Are you conscious that you are a "new creation" in Christ Jesus? New life has come in and through Christ. In the traditional church, Christians are released from the bondage of sin to life in Christ without a mission. If there is to be a renewal of mission, there must be a real change in one's concept of Christianity—involvement.

BURINING ZEAL FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS

Individuals are willing to accept Christianity, provided that it does not demand zeal for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. With many, there is a softness of one's faith, that is to say, there is no burning zeal for spiritual things. How do you compare to the church in Laodicea? Are you hot or cold in your relationship with God? Do you feel as Jeremiah did in speaking about the things of God? He could not keep his mouth shut. Listen to the prophet: "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot'" (**Jeremiah 9:20**).

Do you feel this way? What are your religious convictions? How do you think about Christianity? Do you support the kingdom of God financially with a determined outreach to the lost? Do you provide for the work of God with your money? Do you spend more on dog food than you give to the cause of Christ? Do you spend more on fishing that you give to the cause of Christ? Do you tip the waitress more than you give to the cause of Christ? Has the Gospel of God revolutionized your way of life?

TRUE WORSHIP

Are you involved in promoting God's kingdom? Are you a worshiper of the One true God? What is worship? What is your concept of worship? Is worship something that you just do on Sunday mornings? Or is worship your way of life twenty-four hours a day? Elton Trueblood's words are vivid and to the point as he seeks to call attention to the true concept of worship:

The paradox of the apparent victory, yet real defeat, of the contemporary

> Church is nowhere more vividly demonstrated than in the present concentration upon *attendance*. Great billboard advertisements appear by the hundreds with a single message, "Worship Together This Week." This fact that the donors of the advertisements are undoubtedly motivated by goodwill toward the life of religion, as they understand it, does not obscure the fundamental ineptitude of their effort. Obviously, the sponsors of the advertisements look upon attendance at a religious assembly as the major religious act or the major evidence of church membership. It is no wonder that they think this, if they observe the frantic and sometimes ingenious efforts of pastors, week by week, to surpass all previous records of attendance. The promotional purpose of the local church newsletters is transparent.[9]

It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the whole of their worship with what they do on Sunday morning during the assembling of the saints. For many, worship starts at a certain hour and ends at a certain hour. Yes, one should assemble with God's people on Sundays. Because one is a worshiper of God, he or she meets with the saints, which is an external sign of one's worship. When one assembles with God's people, this activity is a part of one's worship, not the worship. Assembling with God's "chosen people" is a part of one's worship, or devotion, to God. It is a part of one's way of life. When one presents his or her body as a living sacrifice to God, one wants to meet with God's "chosen people" on Sundays or, for that matter, during the week. Christians will adopt the habits of Jesus in His attendance at the synagogues on the Sabbath (see **Luke 4:15-16**).

PURPOSE OF ASSEMBLING

This concept of assembling with God's people raises a question: Why do Christians assemble? Is it to perform a worship service? No! Christians assemble because they are already worshippers of the One true God. Since worship is the presenting of one's body as a living sacrifice (**Romans 12:1**),[10] then Christians assemble with the company of the redeemed in order to encourage one another in the faith. The traditional concept of worship—five rituals performed on Sunday morning—is not the true concept of worship as presented by Paul. One's proper understanding of worship will go a long way in helping to eliminate many divisions within the Christian Community founded by Christ.[11] It is not uncommon for Christians to speak of going to worship, but this concept is not really accurate. The Church is not something you go to; it is the Church, or Temple, that does the going. Christians constitute the Temple of God (see **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**). Trueblood captures this sense when he writes:

> The difference is fundamental and far-reaching. We can go to a railroad station or to a motion picture theater or to a ball game; but a church is something which demands a wholly different human relationship, the relationship of belonging. If a man is really in—really belong to—a church, he is just as much a member of it when he sits at his desk in his business house as when he sits in a pew at his meetinghouse. The point is that the relationship, if real, is continuous, regardless of time and place and performance.[12]

Again, one must analyze his or her concept of Christianity. Is Christianity simply a matter of attendance at a performance or just entertainment? Christians gather in order to strengthen and encourage one another in their daily walk with God (**Hebrews 10:24-25**).

This gathering results from one's worship as a way of life. It seems that many Christians have turned Christianity into just another religion—religious rituals performed on Sunday morning to appease a wrathful God. Jesus did not come to give us another religion; He came to give us eternal life. As a result of the wrong perception of worship, one observes spiritual erosion of love within the company of the redeemed. Christians fight like cats and dogs over a so-called worship service. Divisions, as a whole, hinge on the proper concept of religion—its interpretation over dogma. Without an adequate concept of the Christian *ekklesia*, there will never be a return to the priesthood of all believers. Again, Trueblood goes right to the heart of the matter when he pens:

> The crucial question today is not whether we must have a fellowship, for on that point we are reasonably clear; the crucial question concerns the *character* of the fellowship. The more we think about it the more we realize that it must be a fellowship of the committed. This is because mere belief is not enough.[13]

COMMITMENT TO CHRIST

Christians come together simply because they are a fellowship of the committed. It is not uncommon for Christians to take the position that they do not need to belong or participate in the company of the committed. Some believers treat Sunday as a day for fishing, visiting relatives, going to the lake, and so on. What does Sunday mean to you? Is it a day that you look forward to? Is it a day with which you anticipate hearing the Word of God expounded? Is it a day in which you eagerly long to meet around the Lord's Table to remember the One who died that you might live? Do you crucify the Son of God afresh by your outward behavior? One cannot be effective in God's kingdom with anything less than commitment, but this commitment will not be effective without commitment to the company of the committed.

The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian is the object of commitment. For the believer, his or her commitment is Jesus. Christians not only believe *that* He was, but they also believe *in* Him. It is the height of folly and arrogance for one to think that he or she can live in isolation from the company of the redeemed (**Hebrews 10:23-25**). Self-sufficiency is not the hallmark of a Christian. The believer is ever conscious that he or she is weak and frail and sinful. The author of Hebrews instructs the company of the committed to encourage one another:

> See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first (**Hebrews 3:12-14**).

What does commitment mean to you? Did you pick up on the distinction between *that* and *in*? Belief *in* Christ is different from belief *that*. Gabriel Marcel explains the distinction this way:

> The verb *to believe* is commonly used in an extremely vague and fluctuating way. It can simply mean, 'I presume' or 'it seems to me'. In that context *to believe* appears as something much weaker and more uncertain than to be

> convinced. But in our domain, if we are to reach a greater precision of thought, we shall have to concentrate our attention not on the fact of *believing that* but on that of *believing in*. . . . If I believe in something, it means that I place myself as the disposal of something, or again that I pledge myself fundamentally, and this pledge affects not only *what I have* but also *what I am*.[14]

CONCLUSION

Have you placed yourself at the disposal of Jesus? Have you made a pledge of commitment? Has your promise altered your interest? Has it affected your money? Has it changed your ethical behavior? Has it revolutionized your Sunday habits? Do you know *about* Him or do you *know* Him? Is there a distinction between believing something and believing in something? Do you believe *something* about Jesus or do you believe *in* Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Is there loyalty on your part? Once more, Trueblood captures the very kernel of devotion when he writes: "To be committed is to believe *in*. Commitment, which includes belief but far transcends it, is determination of the total self to act upon conviction."[15] Jesus speaks frankly and forcefully to the lawyer who wanted to know what the greatest commandment in the Law is:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:37-40**).

Every believer believes not only *that* He was, but he or she also believes *in Him* with all of his or her heart, with all of his or her soul, and with all his or her mind. One is either with Jesus or against Him, no middle road. Are you committed to Jesus? Are you committed to His redemptive society, a society known as the Church? Do you realize that Jesus purchased the redemptive community with His own blood (**Acts 20:28**)? How do you respond to the following question: What kind of a church would this church be if all the members were just like me?

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[1] Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: God the Father, God the Son* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1996), 370.

[2] For a more detailed study of Christianity versus Isolationism, see Dallas Burdette, "Christianity versus Isolationism" [ONLINE]. Available from

http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 23 September 2003], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under CHURCH GROWTH.

[3]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

[4] Creg Ogden, *The New Reformation: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24.

[5] Ibid., 29-44.

[6] Ibid., 45-46.

[7] See Robert A. Raines, "The Loss of Mission," in his book *New Life in the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 13-19. I am deeply indebted for his insight concerning the need for a renewal of restoration of Jesus' mission to the world. One cannot read this book without a consciousness of Elton Trueblood's book on *The Company of the Committed*. In fact, it was Trueblood who suggested and encouraged Raines to write his book on *New Life in the Church.*

[8] Ibid., 15.

[9] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 18-19.

[10] For a more detailed study of Romans 12:1, see Dallas Burdette, "Biblical Worship (Romans 12:1)" [ONLINE]. Available from http://freedominchrist.net [accessed 23 September 2003], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

[11] See Ibid., for a more detained discussion of this subject of worship and division under the title, "Congregational Worship and Division."

[12] Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 19..

[13] Ibid., 21.

[14] Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: Faith & Reality*, vol., 2 (New York: University Press of America, 1951, republished 1979), 77.

[15] Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*, 22.

a Deut. 6:5

b Lev. 19:18

A Literary Analysis of Jesus and False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew

Scripture Statement: **Jesus castigates the religious leaders as false prophets because of their rejection of Him as the Messiah and of their ethical behavior.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.**

As one approaches a study of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, one must approach this research with a view of the whole of Matthew's Gospel, not three isolated passages separated from context. Since many Christian journals cite these three Scriptures to justify their separation from other Christians, it is necessary to examine the whole of Matthew's Gospel in order to understand correctly the ones to whom Jesus referred to in His warning and condemnation. How should one approach the three references to "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew? Should one apply this phrase to anyone who does not agree with one's interpretation of Scriptures relating to a so-called worship service. If one, for instance, employs instrumental music in the corporate worship service, is it proper to employ this terminology (false prophets/teachers) against this person? If one employs individual communion cups in the Lord's Supper, is it correct to make use of this epithet in opposition to one who refuses to use the common cup (one container) in the distribution of the fruit of the vine?

Is one a false teacher if he or she does not condemn the use of a fellowship hall connected to the so-called church building? Is one a false teacher if one uses wine in the Lord's Supper? The list is almost *ad infinitum*, that is, without end. Christians must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditions passed on from godly men and women in their efforts to be true to the Word of God. Many Christians are so used to interpreting the Scriptures as they have been taught that they do not reexamine the Scriptures to see if the founding fathers correctly applied God's Word to their beliefs. Mark Allen Powell is correct in his succinct statement about the necessity of utilizing narrative criticism to lend a hand in applying the Scriptures more accurately in his or her search for accurate knowledge. Listen to him as he cuts away the underbrush to get to the text:

> Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The

> sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.[1]

LITERARY CRITICISM

Before analyzing the three texts concerning "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew, it is necessary to review the techniques employed by him as one seeks to unravel the meaning behind this phrase that is so loosely employed by many sincere Christians today. This essay details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to comprehend more clearly as to who the false prophets are that Jesus warns His disciples about. The phrase "false prophet" is employed from Matthew's Gospel in order to justify separation from other believers when viewpoints do not agree. To accomplish this objective of identification of the false prophets, then literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist one in identifying the false prophets in the three different occurrences of the phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. This study draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This critical analysis reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

Since God's revelation is given in story form to His people, this form of communication enables them to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. One can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot for an accurate description of the misleading instructors.[2] This detailed study is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. This literary exploration explores the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.[3]

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole. The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew[4] can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. Hayes and Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units."[5] When the reader posses questions about the literary placement of certain passages, he or she is able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps one to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists one in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.[6] He points out justly so that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."[7] Again,

Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."[8] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text.[9] The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*[10] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. But, on the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.[11] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience presupposed by the narrative itself."[12] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.[13] This treatise is a narrative construction of Matthew's Gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As one begins to read the narrative penned by Matthew, one is immediately made aware that there is a plot. Whenever one has a plot, one has a story.[14] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.[15] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.[16] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and birth to death and resurrection."[17] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."[18] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.[19] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."[20] This arrangement of events is self-evident when one looks at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.[21] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story; in other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen one's understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

> The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice of arrangement (the order of happening) in

presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.[22]

One cannot read Matthew's story[23] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (**1:1—4:16**); next, he describes indirect collision (**4:17—11:1**); then he pictures direct confrontation (**11:2—16:20**); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (**16:21—28:20**). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.[24]

In the development of plot, one recognizes the translating of characters into action.[25] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus.[26] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot.[27]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, one is immediately confronted with various evaluative points of view about the identity of Jesus.[28] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell.[29] There is a contrast in the Book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. One also observes other points of view concerning the crowds. If one's point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in **Matthew 3:17** and **17:5**, then that individual is not thinking the things of God, but rather the things of men (**16:23**).[30]

As one peruses the Book of Matthew, one cannot help but observe various points-of-view about Jesus?[31] One encounters Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (**chapters 1 and 2**). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus.[32] Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, one is confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

As one moves from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, one observes the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of

the disciples did not think the things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of mankind that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men'" (**16:23**). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God's purpose for the salvation of mankind through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this article is to investigate the various viewpoints set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters' points of view coincides with that of God's. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew's history of salvation. This study will reveal that the religious leaders' point of view were in direct opposition to God's point of view. This rejection of God's point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew's Gospel.[33] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus' identity [**1:1—4:16**];[34] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's repudiation of Jesus [**4:17—16:20**];[35] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [**16:21—28:20**].[36] It appears that Matthew employs a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment one: "From that time on Jesus began to preach" (**4:17**) and with the beginning of section three: "From that time on Jesus began to explain" (**16:21**). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.[37]

It seems appropriate to analyze the Book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist one in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As the reader advances through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows[38] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in **7:15**. In Part Two (**4:17—16:20**) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (**16:21—28:20**) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (**26:57-67; 27:32-55**).[39]

FIRST MAJOR SECTION: 1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to "present Jesus to the reader so that he/she will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is."[40] As one approaches this first section (**1:1—4:16**), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of **1:1—4:16.** For

instance, the formula quotation in **Matthew 2:23** is linked to the formula quotation in **4:12-16** through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- "And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: 'He will be called a Nazarene'" (**2:23**).

- "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (**4:12-16**).

Again, Matthew informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- "Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (**2:15**).

These three citations (**2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15**) along with the baptismal declaration (**3:17**) declare the unity of **1:1—4:16**. The baptismal declaration reads: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This passage (**3:17**) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in **2:15**. Also, **4:12-16** is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in **2:23**. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (**1:1—4:16**) also foreshadows the false prophets that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God's Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew unveils Jesus' identity. In this division, one finds the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew's story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased.[41] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For one to trace properly the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, one must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God's evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

Matthew's Evaluative Point of View

Matthew's point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God.[42] For example, in the

prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, "God with us" (**1:21-23**).

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (**Isaiah 7:14**). This reference also discloses God's hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful man. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (**Matthew 1:1-17**). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel's history in the promises He made to Abraham (**Genesis 17:1-9**)[43] and David (**Isaiah 11:1**). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (**Matthew 1:12**) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (**1:1**). It is also significant that in this genealogy, Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (**1:1, 21**) also makes known God's point of view as well as Matthew's point of view.

The name Jesus (Ἰησοῦ, Ihsous, "Jehovah is Salvation) is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ (Χριστοψ, Cristos, "Anointed") is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the personal name of the Messiah (Μεσσιψά, Messias) as Jesus (**1:16**), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (**1:20-21**). Matthew chronicles Joseph's response to the angel: "He gave him the name Jesus" (**1:25**). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, one discovers that God is active in Him for the salvation of mankind. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in **1:1** that Jesus is the Christ, or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (**16:16**)—but also that he is "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham."

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (**1:1—4:16**) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ's rejection of Israel's leaders by recording Pilate's question to the chief priest and elders (**27:20**): "'What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?' Pilate asked" (**27:22**). Even the high priest in Jesus' final hours asked Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (**26:63**). Did Jesus

refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: "Crucify him!" (**27:22**).

The Magi's Evaluative Point of View About Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is "born King of the Jews" (**2:2**). This phrase, "king of the Jews," sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus' identity.[44] In fact, the rest of **2:2** reads: "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Immediately, in Matthew's story, one quickly observes the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi's evaluative point of view is in harmony with God's evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (**27:37**).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the "king of the Jews." Matthew records Pilate's question and Jesus' answer: "Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied" (**27:11**). Jesus response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus' crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (**27:37**).

Herod and the Religious Leaders' Point of View

Herod's evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God's. To illustrate Herod's point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew's prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him" (**2:13**). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (**1:1—4:16**), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the "chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law" (**2:4**) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: '"In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written'" (**2:5**). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns his disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**16:21**).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus' prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be

betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (**17:22-23**). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (**20:17-19**).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in **7:15** and **24:11,24**) in their final outrage against Him.

> In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him (**27:41-44**).

"He saved others" is reflective of **1:21**; "He's the King of Israel" is reflective of **2:2**; and "I am the Son of God" is reflective of **3:17**. The chief priest, the teachers of the law, nor the elders had the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist's Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist's evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (**Matthew 3:7-12**).[45] For example, Matthew captures John's graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:11-12**). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God's evaluative point of view.

Satan's Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, "If (εις, ei) you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (**4:3**).

- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If (εις, ei) you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down" (**4:5-6**).

In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by εις (ei, "if") with the indicative mood in the protasis ("if" clause) and almost

any mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with *ei* ("if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with εςαψν (ean, "if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis ("if" clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God." Satan expresses God's point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God's point of view about Jesus' purpose in coming (4:1-11). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (16:21-23).

Peter's Evaluative Point of View

Peter's evaluation of Jesus in **16:13-20** reflects God's evaluative point of view in **3:17**. Matthew highlights God's point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew's introduction—"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" [**3:13**]—one observes a dialogue between John and Jesus **(3:14-15**) and two revelatory events that follow (**3:16-17**). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**3:17**). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan (**4:1-11**). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God's way of redemption. Later in Matthew's story (**16:21—28:20**) when Peter tried to prevent the atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (**4:1-12**).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Following this confession Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (**16:17**). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (**3:17**). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: "'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (**17:5**).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION: 4:17—16:20

Following Matthew's introduction to Jesus as Messiah (**1:1—4:16**), he embarks upon Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel (**4:17—11:1**).[46] Matthew calls attention to Jesus' ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (**4:17**). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (**9:36**). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (**12:34**). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to

where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (**3:7-8**).

JESUS' MINISTRY TO ISRAEL: 4:17—11:1

Jesus' Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus' ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (**5:20**), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the Gospel (**4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1**). After Jesus learns of John's imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (**4:12**). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (**4:12-13**). During this period of time, He proclaims the good news that the kingdom of heaven is near (**4:17**). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (**4:18-20**); shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (**4:21-22**). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see **chapters 8 and 9**), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (**9:9-13**). Then, in **chapter 10**, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (**10:1-4**).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee "Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in **9:35** and **11:1**. The third summary of Jesus' ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1
Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (**4:25**). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (**4:24**), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him (**4:24-25**).

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (**5:1—**

7:28). If one wants to understand what He taught (4:23), then one must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (5:17-20). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Just as in the first section of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until chapter 12.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (5:10-13) whom He later described as false prophets (7:15). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). This statement by Jesus echoes John's renunciation of the Pharisees (3:7) and the complicity of the teachers of the law with Herod (2:4).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (5:21-48) and acts of piety (6:1-18). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (5:21a), "But I tell you" (5:22). Jesus is not contradicting the law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the law. He is not nullifying the law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of the law. If Jesus is abolishing the law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus' earlier statement:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven (5:17-19).[47]

Jesus' Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus' ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (8:1—9:38). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew's readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (5:10-12). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (chapters 8 and 9 record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (8:1-4), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (8:5-13), cures Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (8:16-17). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle,

namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (**8:23-27**). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (**8:28-34**).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (**9:1**). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (**9:2a**). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (**9:2b**). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the law. Again, one is reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (**7:15**). These teachers of the law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (**9:3**). Suddenly in this **ninth chapter**, one witnesses conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, one should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

> "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men (**9:4-8**).

Not only does the second section (**4:17—16:20**) of Part One (**4:17-11:1**) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (**10:7-8**). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in **chapter 10**, one beholds bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this **chapter (10)**, Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (**10:16**). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (**10:17**). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (**5:10-12**).

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (**4:23**). In **4:17**, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is through this proclamation that Jews and Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God's gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God's kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan's Rules?

What does the "kingdom of heaven" mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, "the kingdom of heaven is near" (**3:2**), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, 'God with us'" (**1:23**). And in **12:28**, Matthew states Jesus' announcement: "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The Gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The Gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the Good News about God's way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The Gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (**1:21**). The Gospel is simply Good News about God's way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this good news in a conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God (**John 3:16-21**).

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate **4:17—11:1** (part "A") as it does in **11:2—16:20** (part "B"). Part "A" of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders; in part "A" the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (**9:1-8**). In this first section, one is led to count on battle. In **4:17—8:34** Matthew forewarns the reader that he is to anticipate

conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (**5:10-12**), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (**5:20**).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (**6:1-18**). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders' motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**7:28-29**). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (**8:5-10**) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (**8:11-12**).

Now in **chapter 9**, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized; it is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of a paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!" (**9:3**). They declare "to themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's home (**9:9-10**). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (**9:11**).

In **Chapter 10**, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (**10:1-15**). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (**10:16-39**). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (**7:15**), now Jesus warns them about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach the message of kingdom of God (**10:7,8,16**).[48]

In the first major section (**4:1—4:16**), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (**3:17**). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's point of view that Jesus is His Son (**3:17**) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (**4:3, 6**).[49] The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (**2:1-6**), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist who is supportive of Jesus (**3:7-12**).[50] In this first section, one comes away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, one, upon a closer reading, immediately grasps that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (**2:3-6**). Also one immediately grasps Jesus' eschatological judgment (**Matthew 24 and 25**) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from

> the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:7-12**).

As stated above, the second major section (**4:17—16:20**) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (**4:17—11:1** and **11:2—16:20**). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**), rather than on the element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (**4:17**). But in this second section (**11:2—16:20**) of the second major division (**4:17—16:20**), one observes Jesus' anguish of Israel's negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (**11:16-19**). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, one should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1—16:20

In part "B" of the second major section, the leaders' threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (**12:14**). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in **9:3**. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew's story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders' hostilities are no longer secretive (**9:1-8**), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation over the disciples' picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (**12:2-8**). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (**12:9**) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (**12:10**). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10	Matthew 12:38
Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"	Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2	Matthew 15:1-2

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."	Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

In this second subdivision (part B), one observes the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in **12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9**. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (**12:14**). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (**12:22-37, 38-45**). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub **Matthew 12:36-37**	**The Sign of Jonah** **Matthew 12:41-42**
But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.	The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in **Matthew 24 and 25**. This judgment is the same "coming wrath" that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (**3:7-12**): "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (**3:12**). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (**13:36-43**):

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (**13:40-43**).

As stated above, the religious leaders' opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in **Matthew 12**, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (**12:14**). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are "evil" (**12:23, 39, 45; 16:4**), spiritually blind (**12:24, 38, 42; 16:3**), hypocritical (**12:10;**

15:7; 16:10), conniving (12:14), murderous (12:14), unfaithful to God (12:39; 16:4), unrepentant (12:41), and lawless (15:3, 6). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (12:43-45); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (12:38; 16:1). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (4:17—16:20), part B (11:2—16:20), one witnesses the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- 12:1-8 Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- 12:9-14 Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- 12:22-37 Healing Blind and Dumb Demoniac
- 12:38-45 Demand for a Sign
- 15:1-20 Eating with Defiled Hands
- 16:1-4 Second Demand for a Sign
- 16:5-12 The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus' ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major section (1:1—4:16), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in 11:2—16:20 is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (11:2-3). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (12:22-23).

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in 1:1—4:16. But in this second part, one is also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (4:1—4:16), as well as in part two (4:17—16:20), breaks into the world of Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (3:17; 17:5). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater

detail, the third section (**16:21—28:20**). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about who the Son of Man is (**16:13**).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (**4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1**). But in spite all of this fame, one still observes conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (**4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (**9:3, 11, 34**). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (**11:2—12:50**). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (**2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42**). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (**11:16-19**). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (**11:20-21**), and Capernaum (**11:23-24**) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: '"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him" (**13:55-57a**).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (**14:1-2**). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (**14:3-11**). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (**14:24-33**), they all proclaimed: "Truly you are the Son of God." (**14:33**). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (**8:27**). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (**16:13-20**): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (**16:16**). Peter's point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God's point of view (**3:17; 16:23a**). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various

segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (**16:13-14**).

In the second part (**4:17—16:20**), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (**4:17—11:1**) and of Israel's response to Him (**11:2—16:20**). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God's end-time rule (**5:1—8:1**). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (**9:3**). This section consists mainly of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing (**4:23; 9:35; 11:1**).

In the later part of Matthew's story, one observes a change (**11:2—16:20**). To all intents and purposes, Jesus' ministry is without success. In fact, Israel's response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (**12:1—8, 9—14; 15:1-9**). The leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (**9:34; 12:24**). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (**16:13-14**).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (**16:16; 14:33**). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence; they do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus' ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. But, on the other hand, His ministry, in the sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION: 16:21—28:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus' prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (**Matthew 16:21**). One observes that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary ("he must go" or "it is necessary," dei`). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (**1:21**), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders' objective is destruction (**12:14**). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Prior to these predictions, one recalls Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (**16:16**). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples "not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (**17:9**).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus:

"Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (**16:22**). Peter still did not understand the atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (**16:23**). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (**4:10**). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, one finds three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (**3:17**). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (**17:5**). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (**16:21**), but Peter says "no" (**16:22**). But on the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (**16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (**17:22-23**). One can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (**17:9**). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-48**).

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (**Matthew 20:17**). He took the disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (**20:18-19**).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (**21:1**). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (**21:9**). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to who this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (**21:11**). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (**21:13**). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (**21:12-13**). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (**21:12—23:39**).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (**21:15**)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (**21:23**)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (**22:15-16**)
- The Sadducees (**22:23**)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (**22:24-35**)

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

> "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions (**22:42-46**)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**5:20**).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (**chapter 23**). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (**chapter 24**). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (**chapter 25**).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (**26:1-5**). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (**3:17; 17:5**). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (**26:1**). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as to what His death is all about: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**26:27-28**). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (**26:57-67**), before Pilate (**27:11-26**), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (**27:27-31**). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (**27:32-44**), the death of Jesus (**27:45-55**), the burial of Jesus (**27:57-66**), the resurrection of Jesus (**28:1-10**), the guards' report (**28:11-15**), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (**28:16-20**).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew's Gospel (**16:21-28:20**) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with **Matthew 16:21**, one observes an escalation of the "powers that be" to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (**27:20**). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to "Watch out for false prophets" (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**). The first warning followed Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders' theology (**Matthew 5—6**) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (**Matthew 23**) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

This essay has analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (**4:1—1:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21—28:20**) of Matthew's Gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, one observes that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, one observes direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders' concept of God's

righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders' characteristics (**chapter 24 and 25**). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A one observes, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B one observes an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section (**16:21—28:20**), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

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[1] Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

[2] See Ronald David Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

> Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks at a text, rather than through it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

[3] Ibid., 95.

[4] Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[5] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

[6] Powell, *Criticism, 1-10.*

[7] Ibid., 7.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See "The Present Crisis Within the Churches of Christ" (part 2 of 4 in this series) for examples of not applying the principles of literary analysis in seeking to comprehend the false prophets passages in Matthew 7:14; 24:11, 24. As a result of this loose interpretation by many Christians, each division within the Churches of Christ claims the false prophets citations as their own exclusive ticket to defend their separation from other Christians.

[10] See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

> Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who

> will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

[11] An example of this distinction is found in my article on The Passover Traditions in the First Century—where the *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knows about the Passover traditions in the first century [ON-LINE—available from http://www.freedominchrist.net (accessed 24 June 2004), located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS, and then under the subheading LORD'S SUPPER. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

[12] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

[13] See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

> Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[14] See Witherup, " Cross of Jesus," 120, 139.

[15] Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[16] Ibid., 19.

[17] Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story,* 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See also Bauer, "The Cross of Jesus," 62.

[20] E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel,* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[21] Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[22] Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Plot" in *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

[23] See Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: "This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place).

[24] Forster, Novel, 86.

[25] See Bauer, "Structure," 26, where he comments on "plot":

> Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the "plot." Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[26] See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, 168.

[27] Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[28] Ibid., 34.

[29] Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, "Discourse," 67.

[30] For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, S*tory,* 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph., D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[31] See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[32] Powell, "Leaders," 184.

[33] I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story*, for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical

Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[34] Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[35] This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17—11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2—16:20]; Witherup, The Cross of Jesus, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[36] Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[37] For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[38] Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[39] Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

[40] Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[41] For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

[42] See Kingsbury, *Story,* 35.

[43] "When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.' Abram fell face down, and God said to him, 'As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God'" (**Genesis 17:1-8**).

[44] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

[45] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[46] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

[47] For a detailed study of the Old Testament and its relevance, see Dallas Burdette, "The Authority of the Old Testament: A Brief Summary of the Relevance of the Old Testament within the Christian Community" [ON-LINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 7 July 2004], located under caption BIBLICAL

STUDIES and then under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[48] Jack Dean Kingsbury, ***Story***,

[49] Powell, "Leaders," 217.

[50] Ibid.

Biblical Solutions to Divisions Within the Christian Community

Part 1 of 4

Scripture Statement: **God wants His people to be one in love and unity.**

Scripture Reading: **Romans 14 & 15; 1 Corinthians 8**

Even though this essay focuses on divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement, nevertheless, the principles set forth in this article are applicable to Christians within the various fellowships.[1] As one reflects upon unity within the Christian community, one cannot help but recall the prayer of Jesus to the Father concerning oneness among His disciples. Yet, this prayer has gone unheeded by many sincere Christians. Within the Christian community, one witnesses division and hatred on every street corner, so to speak. This division is not, as mentioned above, just with those within the Churches of Christ, but it is a common factor within the Body of Christ as a whole. What are the major causes of divisions within the Churches of Christ? What are the major causes of divisions within the rest of God's family? What is the biblical solution to the divisions within the Body of Christ? One of the chief factors in the cause of division centers around the epithet "false teacher." Who is and who is not an unhealthy teacher. How should one interpret the three occurrences of this phrase in the Gospel of Matthew? If one assigns this phrase to individuals who simply disagree with the opinions of others, there will never be unity within the company of the redeemed. If Christians continue to adopt certain terms (clichés) without discrimination, divisions will continue to proliferate within the fellowship of God's children.

Another reason for division is the confusion of how to interpret the Scriptures. Christians frequently divide as a result of an improper approach to God's Word. Much of the divisions within this once united body (Churches of Christ) is fragmented into warring factions over the traditions handed down by the forefathers within the Stone/Campbell Movement—a movement that originated with three distinct epithets: Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, and Church of Christ.[2] Through the years, the Churches of Christ have divided into numerous factions—about twenty-five. In all these splinter groups, one discovers sincere Christians who seek to be true to the Word of God. What is common in all the splinter groups is the identification of their interpretation with the Word of God

itself. The interpretations, in many areas, is simply tradition passed on from the forefathers. Jaroslav Pelikan calls attention to the devastating effects of tradition upon the Body of Christ:

> Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. The reformers of every age, whether political or religious or literary, have protested against the tyranny of the dead, and in doing so have called for innovation and insight in place of tradition.[3]

In any society of God's family, one discovers certain clichés that appear in order to give credence to the actions of certain Christians in their separation from other believers. One objective in this study is to analyze some of the more frequently misused expressions to foster division within the community of Resurrection. Another intention of this particular study is to assist elders, preachers, and members within the Churches of Christ to become more adept in correctly handling the Word of God (**2 Timothy 2:15**), especially in the correct application of false prophets as found in the Gospel of Matthew. [4]

In order to accomplish this target, it is my intention to share with leaders and members the tools needed to recapture the art of how to read the Bible in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (**John 17:20-23**). This exploration of biblical unity analyzes Paul's handling of differences within the congregations at Rome and Corinth. This summary demonstrates that imperfection in understanding does not, in and of itself, warrant the stigma of false prophets as a result of misinterpretation. Also this study discusses, as stated above, the failure on the part of many Christians in their oversight to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people.

To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**). This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**). Since God accepted them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow Christians for whom Christ died. Many devout Christians do not realize the purpose of Jesus' prayer because they do not discern who is or who is not a false prophet in the light of the context of Matthew's narrative. Since Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union, then this paper explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayer for singularity of purpose.

Since my personal ministry is primarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warring factions, each promoting its own brand of Christianity.[5] Today, for example, within the

Churches of Christ, one soon discovers that there are approximately twenty-five divisions—each claiming to be the loyal church.

Each group maintains that it is speaking where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. For one not to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group is to receive the label false prophet. Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for one to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, one does not distinguish between one's critique of God's Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the "at odds" fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

Unity among many Churches of Christ is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity,[6] which is also true in many other denominations. But numerous Churches of Christ are returning to the biblical concept of unity in diversity. And, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many elders and preachers, the unity-in-conformity group labels the unity-in-diversity fellowship as "false teachers" or liberal brethren.[7]

Today, the Churches of Christ, as a whole, are hopelessly engaged in combat. These skirmishes are based upon a faulty reading of many Scriptures that are employed as means of justification for separation from other Christians. One such Scripture is **Matthew 7:15**: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." [8]

In order to combat this loose type of explanation, it is necessary for me to expound upon the principles of examination to combat an illegal use of Scriptures to foster division. The Word of God provides its own environment for a proper understanding of its teachings. This study explores the presupposition that false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew are not necessarily individuals who fail to make clear the Scriptures, but rather the false prophets are individuals whose ethical behavior is not in harmony with God's law. To accomplish this target of correctly identifying the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, this examination sets forth various standards of exposition on how to read the Scriptures with understanding—especially narrative interpretation.

In other words, this treatise studies in detail the context in which the phrase "false prophets" occurs, and also deals with obstacles that might hinder a proper application of a healthy understanding as to whom the phrase false prophets designates. This in-depth development of context[9] is essential for proper growth and development and unity in God's *ekklesia* (church). To facilitate the usefulness of contextual studies, this investigation briefly explores two congregations in biblical times in which differences existed in order to help believers in Christ today to determine how Christians should react to similar circumstances in which deficiency in knowledge was prevalent.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Within the Churches of Christ, the epithet "false prophet" is assigned to individuals who do not subscribe to a particular interpretation of a distinctive fellowship. Correctness in doctrine, according to some, is the measurement of right standing before God.

Imperfection in one's knowledge calls forth the title of false prophet. Since this study about false prophets is concerned about the identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, then an analysis of certain historical situations in the New Testament should help to dispel an incorrect classification as to who is and who is not a false prophet in Matthew's Gospel.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not making allowances for shortcomings in understanding among some believers in the congregation. Paul calls attention in his first letter to Corinth to a wrong perception of correctness as the criterion by which one is placed in a right relationship with God.

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God (**1 Corinthians 8:1-3**).

Paul did not castigate those with imperfection in knowledge as false teachers/prophets. As one peruses the various citations from Scripture, one immediately recognizes that deformity in knowledge does not necessarily mean that one is a false teacher. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is clearly dealing with insufficient knowledge and one's relationship to God—a relationship based upon love, not upon absolute knowledge.

Paul develops in the Corinthian Epistle the concept that God loves the person with limited knowledge as well as the person with clear insight. With Paul, as long as one loves God—in spite of deficiency in aptitude—this person is acceptable to God. The "intent of the heart" does play an important role in deciding who is and who is not acceptable to God. Paul further demonstrates the principle of love and relationship in the following comments about idols and one's belief system:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this (**1 Corinthians 8:4-7a**).

THE ROMAN CHURCH

To set the stage for sounder principles of hermeneutics, a brief reflection upon **Romans 14 and 15** should shed further light on how Paul reacted toward those whose knowledge was deficient. In these two chapters, Paul deals with those who wanted to make exact interpretation the criterion by which one determines one's faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The **first four verses** of **chapter 14** demonstrate forcefully Paul's attitude in this matter of reception and rejection. Paul captures this spirit of patience in graphic language in this letter to Rome.

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose

> faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**Romans 14:1-4**).

Paul did not accuse the misinformed as being false prophets/teachers, but rather he rebuked those who passed judgment on those who were mistaken. God can make one stand even with deformity in one's knowledge.

DIFFERENTIATION OF CONCEPTS

This examination of false prophets/teachers in the Gospel of Matthew seeks to eliminate the confusion of certain terms that encourages and promotes division within the Churches of Christ. In not distinguishing between certain terms exercised by the Spirit, many Christians have brought about chaos in the *ekklesia* of God and are hopelessly divided into numerous camps. Part of the problem lies with the failure to differentiate adequately between terms employed by various branches within the Churches of Christ. For example, one's delinquency in not differentiating between *unity* and *fellowship*, *unity* and *conformity*, *fellowship* and *agreement, gospel* and *doctrine, as well as fellowship* and *endorsement* has contributed to a proliferation of sects within the Churches of Christ. And an inexact use of the above terms continues to uphold the orthodoxy of each divided circle. Thus, when one does not make proper applications of the various phrases employed among many Christians, then this lack of proper differentiation contributes to an abuse of the phrase "false prophets."

By distinguishing between specific key phrases adopted by many, this clarification of understanding will help to clear away the underbrush that prevents Christians from properly interpreting false prophets in the Book of Matthew. By eliminating certain presuppositions, one can approach the text without a lot of excess baggage. The following scenario is a brief analysis of the various cliches employed by many well-meaning Christians to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. This study seeks to awaken within every individual a correct understanding of the numerous rigid formulas in order to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed and to correctly identify the false prophets that He warned against.

Unity and Fellowship

Some leaders within the Churches of Christ do not make a distinction between *unity* and *fellowship*. According to some Christians, unity is founded upon fellowship of agreement, not unity created by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians advocate that the unity of the Spirit is as a result of fellowship with other believers in the same interpretative community,[10] but this philosophy is not biblical.[11] Unity is that which the Holy Spirit creates, not man. It is the Spirit's unity.[12] In fact, Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (**Ephesians 4:3**). In other words, Paul says, "spare no effort." To what end? Not to produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to keep the unity. This unity is already in existence. It is unity of all those who believe and respond to the message of redemption expounded in **chapters 1—3 of Ephesians**. In other words, fellowship is a fruit of unity, not unity a

fruit of fellowship. Carl Ketcherside is therefore right when he says,

> The Spirit introduces all of the obedient believers into one body and thus forms an active fellowship of all who respond to the Good News. He does this without regard for nation or social distinctions. He generates a vital unity of all who are regenerated.[13]

Unity and Conformity

Again, Christians must differentiate between *unity* and *conformity*. Within the Christian community, Christians have sought to base a superstructure of religion upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge and wisdom. The traditional concept of unity is based upon conformity in knowledge and wisdom.[14] But, it goes almost without saying that conformity in the absolute demands equal ability of perception, simultaneous arrival at perfection in knowledge, and universality of wisdom. Alexander Campbell drove home this point extremely well when he penned:

> It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.[15]

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not external organizational unity. This unity is the unity of persons. It is a fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all those who believe. This means that the unity in the *ekklesia* of God involves this fellowship of being. When one is born again, born of the Spirit, or becomes a partaker of the divine nature, this person shares in this unity for which Jesus prayed. And so He calls everyone into the fellowship through the Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). There can be no unity at all in our Lord's sense apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit who creates within every believer this new nature. Paul wrote: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (**1 Corinthians 12:13**). Jürgen Moltmann once said with his typical pungency:

> The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with unanimity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented, or forced into conformity with conditions prevailing in the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps. This unity is an evangelical unity, not a legal one.[16]

Fellowship and Agreement

Another concept that divides many within the Churches of Christ is that some do not make a separation between the terms *fellowship* and *agreement*. In many camps, if there is no agreement, then there is no fellowship. Leaders and members throughout Churches of Christ are now realizing that fellowship does not come as a result of one's agreement upon

matters of opinion and interpretation, but rather one's ability to reach agreement upon doctrinal issues comes as a result of fellowship. Christians are not one in opinion; they are one in Christ. One does not become a child of God through study, acquisition of knowledge, learning of the law, or skill as teacher but through procreation not education. Ketcherside is quite correct in observing that

> As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven at all.[17]

Gospel and Doctrine

Next, one must discriminate between *gospel* and *doctrine*, a separation drawn by the writers of the New Testament. There is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that one eats after he or she is born. Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between Gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the Gospel brought one into being while the doctrine was essential to one's growth and well being; Paul did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion.[18] Those who confuse chastisement of a child with begettal and cannot distinguish between correction and conception are in a sad predicament.[19]

Fellowship and Endorsement

Once more, one must distinguish between fellowship and endorsement, which is one of the major problems within the Churches of Christ. Many are under the impression that to have fellowship with one another is to endorse whatever the other person believes, which cannot be true. All Christians are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to believe that God endorses everything a person believes or does? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (**14:1**). Again, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**15:7**). But still, someone may ask, "Are you in fellowship with error?" No, one is in fellowship with individuals. The question posed by many is: "Are you in fellowship with brothers in error?" One's response must be "yes," because that is the only kind of brothers and sisters one knows about. As Alexander Campbell has made clear:

> So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union, was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. . . . But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this

ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.[20]

OBJECTIVES IN THE STUDY OF FALSE PROPHETS

IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

In the course of this study, it will be necessary to allocate a specific study to the appellation of false prophets as employed by Jesus in the Matthean narrative (**7:15; 24:11, 24**). This literary examination of false prophets is designed to teach leaders and members of the Churches of Christ how to determine who the false prophets are in the various texts in the Gospel of Matthew, and then to teach these truths to other members in their own congregations to bring about the unity for which our Lord prayed. As a preliminary to the major study on false prophets, some time will be spent discussing the basic rules of interpretation and how certain terms play a major role in how one reacts to others who are not in their accomplished campground.

Since all Christians are under a mandate to "Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (**Ephesians 5:1-2**), then it is imperative that everyone work toward making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3). It is the objective of this project to teach leaders and members of the Churches of Christ to spell out the Word of God more completely and to increase one's skill in teaching others how to read the Scriptures more effectively. The highest mission in this essay is to encourage oneness among God's family. My hypothesis is that when Christians are taught how to read the Gospel of Matthew from a narrative viewpoint, then they will arrive at a correct understanding and identification of who the false prophets are in Matthew.

CONCLUSION

My emphasis in this brief study has called attention to the unity of the Spirit that all Christians are to strive to uphold. Since Christians are to preserve this unity in all good consciousness, then a number of cliches were analyzed to help clear away the underbrush or cobwebs in their thinking so that they do not violate their beliefs. This review sought to assist individuals in eradicating fuzzy understanding in order to bring about an answer to Christ's priestly prayer for unity (**John 17**).

This research explored the utter impossibility of making absolute perfection in knowledge the condition of salvation and fellowship. Since many Christians within the Churches of Christ advance unblemished perfection in knowledge of one's party beliefs before they can extend the right hand of fellowship, Paul was called upon to see if this philosophy is what he taught before he extended friendly intercourse to other devoted saints. To refute faultlessness in knowledge as a prerequisite for association, this discussion looked at two congregations (Corinth and Rome) in which differences existed in order to determine from a biblical perspective the mind-set to be exercised by Christians in similar circumstances today. In spite of disagreements within these two fellowships, Paul called for forbearance, not ostracism.

This examination of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew is <u>not</u> designed to

question the sincerity of those that disagree with the findings of this essay; these individuals, too, are seeking to be true to the Word of God. The design of this paper is to encourage individuals to become peacemakers, not piecemakers. In other words, Christians are to promote peace and harmony, not to fracture the Body of Christ into warring factions.

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[1] This is the first of a series on "false prophets" within the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew employs the words *false* prophets three times in his Gospel. Each time this phrase is used, Jesus is the one who employs it. It is not uncommon for Christians to toss this phrase around rather loosely against anyone who does not adhere to his or her brand of orthodoxy. The objective of this series of essays is to assist Christians in their quest for unity among God's people. Since this author is from a Church of Christ background, the journals cited in this first essay, as a whole, are from the various divisions within the Churches of Christ. In subsequent essays (four more), this author explores the writings of many authors—not just authors associated with the Church of Christ.

[2] This composition is not a condemnation of those who have misapplied Jesus' phrase, but to help Christians to learn how Jesus employed this saying—a phrase used against the religious leaders of His day for their hypocrisy and refusal to accept His Messiahship. Even though I cite a number of authors from the Churches of Christ, I am still conscious that they are God's children—men and women who want to do what God wants them to accomplish.

[3] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

[4] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

[5] See Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint, 1985, 107, 108 where he writes in Proposition One: "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."

[6] For an example of this mind-set, see Jerry Dickinson, "Unity in Diversity," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 8-9. The one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers, and so on, publish this particular journal. See also Don L. King, "Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995):2, 7.

Billy D. Dickinson writes another insightful article that discloses the inner feelings of this peculiar fellowship, "False Teachers and Fellowship, *Old Paths Advocate* LXVIII, no. 10 (October 1995): 1, 9.

[7] See J. E. Choate, "The Baby Boomers and Unity in Diversity," *Firm Foundation* 108, no. 8 (August 1993): 18-20.

[8] This author has examined numerous Scriptures currently in use by many Christians to justify their separation from other believers over doctrinal matters. See Dallas Burdette's website: www.freedominchrist.net for an examination of the various texts within context These essays are found under the caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[9] In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, one must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

[10] Interpretative communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumption." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). I have chosen to use "interpretative community" rather than "interpretive community" as employed by Fish.

[11] For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Dallas Burdette, "The 'Is' and 'Is Not' of Fellowship, *Restoration Review* 15, no. 10 (December 1973): 194-196.

[12] See Dallas Burdette, "The Spirit Makes Us One," *Restoration Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1974): 276-277.

[13] Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (July 1963): 3 [99]. To access all of the issues of *Mission Messenger* [On-Line], go to: www.unity-in-diversity.org

[14] For an insightful article on unity, see Leroy Garrett, "Unity is God's Gift," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 8 (October 1973): 150-152. See also Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 1-16.

[15] Alexander Campbell, "Millennium—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (Monday, April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

[16] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 343.

[17] Carl Ketcherside, "Contrary to Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 4.

[18] See Dallas Burdette, "Restoring the Biblical Ideal of Preaching" in *Restoration Forum VIII* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1990), 147-155.

[19] See Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 1-11. I am indebted to Ketcherside for assisting me in a clearer understanding of the distinction between gospel and doctrine.

[20] Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," The *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 176, 177.

Principles of Interpretation Applied to an Interpretation of False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew

Thrust Statement: **Christians should eliminate difficulties that stand in the way of correct interpretation.**

Scripture Reading: **2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:10-12; Revelation 2:7**

As one approaches the study of God's Word, one is conscious that there are negative and positive influences on interpretation. The negative aspect of interpretation focuses on preunderstanding in one's approach to study. In other words, one's mind is filled with ideas, traditions, experiences, and so on, which interfere with correct understanding. Preunderstanding, to some extent, is the source of the many divisions that presently exist within Christendom. Yet, at the same time, preunderstanding is necessary (positive side), to some extent, to a proper understanding of God's written Revelation. If one's mind were a *tabular rasa* (The mind before it receives the impressions gained from experience.) it would not be possible for one to gain knowledge. Since the mind is not a *tabular rasa*, this makes knowledge possible.[1] If one assumes a preunderstanding of **Matthew 7:15** concerning "false prophets" before he or she begins one's work as an interpreter, this preunderstanding may color his or her interpretation. Preunderstanding may be either good or bad, depending on one's use. One must never forget that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning, not the interpreter's meaning. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., writes:

> An interpreter might, of course, infer meanings which according to our judgment could not possibly under any circumstances be implied by the author's words, but in that case, we would reject the interpretation not because it is private but because it is probably wrong.[2]

It is in this same vein that Jaroslav Pelikan strips away all underbrush as he seeks to call attention to tradition that is not healthy:

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant

> research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[3]

Before launching into the primary text for this particular study (**Matthew 7:15**), it is necessary to give some background in hermeneutics (the science of interpretation), along with an in-depth meaning of hermeneutics. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermachr originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts."[4] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[5] Hermeneutics[6] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.[7] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and "now."[8] L. Berkhof makes the following succinct observation:

> The *necessity* of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:
>
> (1) Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence on his conscious mental life. Therefore, special efforts must be made to guard against error.
> (2) Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally. They differ, for instance,
> (a) in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of spiritual affinity:
> (b) in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated; and
> (c) in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought, customs, and morals.[9]

Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt "to reach an informed understanding of the text."[10] It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the "linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings," writes Cedric Johnson.[11] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution:

> The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.[12]

To set the tone for this analysis of the principles of interpretation concerning **Matthew 7:15**, perhaps it would be helpful to review the experiences of numerous individuals within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement. Many within this Movement encounter long-held traditions in his/her quest to understand the Word of God in its context.[13] It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their

"interpretative community" with the Word itself. Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

> Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed that "what we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."[14]

Untold numbers with whom I have discussed the science of exposition have shared their frustrations and have described their Christian journeys as "Gullible's Travels." Christians often accept what they are taught without question. It is in this sense that their interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, they have never taken the time to employ their minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for themselves, nor have they looked at the Scriptures objectively. Their interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."[15] Their interpretations are hand-me-downs from their interpretative community. Again, Fish rightly says, "In other words interpretive [16] communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."[17] In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

> And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that no one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.[18]

Leaders, especially ministers within the Churches of Christ, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But their interpretation frequently is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the Biblical text.[19] Once more, the Gonzalezs' caution: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[20] It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background.

Some religious writers within the Churches of Christ suppose they have all the answers. And as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. To justify condemnation over against the so-called nonconformist, then **Matthew 7: 15** is cited: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

One must be careful that one does not go to the Scriptures to prove what one already believes, but rather to see what they say. Many are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between interpretation and revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional

interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.[21] This failure to discriminate between explanation and divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative.

One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.[22] People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one's preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One's own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One's prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.[23] The culture of one's heritage controls the text of the Bible. One should never forget that one's own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

> My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[24]

CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God's written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that one attaches to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, the interpreter may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person's particular context tends to shape his/her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, "An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history."[25]

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. One must not employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out with justification that

> People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[26]

One may cite **Matthew 7:15**—"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves"—correctly, but not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. One may speak *where* the Bible speaks and not speak *as* the Bible speaks.[27] In order to understand this passage of Scripture, it is necessary to study the whole of Matthew's Gospel before analyzing individual elements.

A BASIC PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION: VIEW OF THE WHOLE VERSUS THE PARTICULAR

As one contemplates a study of the whole of Matthew's Gospel, it is imperative that one examine the full text before an analysis of its parts (for example, **Matthew 7:15**). If a reader explores a specific verse without weighing its sum total, then one's reflection may radically alter a correct view of a particular text. Examples of particularization of texts without contexts to support certain dogmatic presuppositions are rampant among many Christians. We may consider the following isolated Scriptures as examples of frequently cited texts that are misapplied by many sincere Christians to uphold a sectarian spirit that divides the Christian community for which Jesus prayed (**John 17**).

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves (**Matthew 7:15**).

- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (**7:13-14**).[28]

- If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (**5:29-30**).

- But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (**5:39**).

- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (**7:1-2**).[29]

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of his/her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One's interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward

the tendency to impose one's own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations (**Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**).

For many believers, false prophets (**7:15**) are those who disagree with their brand of orthodoxy or interpretation of Scripture. Also, many appeal to the Scripture (**7:13-14**) about the small gate and the narrow road to give credence to their particular denominational stance as the only way to heaven. Some Christians have even taken the self-mutilation language (**5:29-30**) as a call to physical impairment of the body. Among the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, the turning of the right cheek (**5:39**) is cited as justification for not defending one's country in the time of war.[30]

One cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. Everyone is to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. One needs to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this study on hermeneutics will assist one's understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions; one must guard against his/her interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew.

General Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is remembered for its Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Golden Rule. The Gospel of Matthew is cherished for its union of Gospel and ethics, of faith and morality. Matthew's Gospel is concerned to recover the moral and ethical aspects of the Christian life, something that the Old Testament prophets also sought to capture. Matthew speaks against those who set themselves over against the ethical instructions of Jesus. For Matthew, it is not sufficient just to accept Jesus as the Messiah,

but one must obey Him. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about—ethical behavior that is pleasing to God. In fact, Matthew includes the stern warning of Jesus against those who do not obey God: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (**7:21**). Then, Matthew also concludes his Gospel with Jesus' admonition to His apostles to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (**28:19-20**). Thus, Matthew begins and ends the ministry of Jesus with a call to correct conduct.

The Gospel's Structure

Before one ventures into the narrative studies of the three major divisions of Matthew's Gospel, an analysis of the five major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew should help one in the identification of the false prophets of Jesus' time as well as the time of Matthew's writing this Gospel. The Gospel of Matthew appears to be written around five major discourses.

- The Sermon on the Mount (**5:1—8:1**)
- The Charge to the Apostles (**chapter 10**)
- The Parables (**chapter 13**)
- The Lesson on Forgiveness (**chapter 18**)
- The Judgment and End of Jerusalem (**chapters 24—25**)

Following the five discourses, Matthew gives a transition that concludes each major discourse:

- "When Jesus had finished saying these things" (**7:28**)
- "After Jesus had finished instructing" (**11:1**)
- "When Jesus had finished these parables" (**13:53**)
- "When Jesus had finished saying these things" (**19:1**)
- "When Jesus had finished saying all these things" (**26:1**)

Matthew's Gospel can further be divided into ten sections in which "doing" and "teaching" alternate.

NARRATIVE	TEACHING	TRANSITION
1—4	**5—7**	**7:28**
8:1—9:34	**9:35—10:42**	**11:1**
11:2—12:50	**13:1—52**	**13:53**
13:53—17:27	**18:1—35**	**19:1**
19:1—23:39	**24:1—25:46**	**26:1**
26:1—28:20 Passion Week		

Matthew portrays Jesus as *doer* and *teacher*. He records at least twenty miracles and six major messages. Approximately sixty percent of Matthew's Gospel focuses on the teachings of Jesus. It is also significant that he arranges his material in a topical, rather than a chronological order. For instance, he groups ten miracles together in **chapters 8—9**. The above outline helps one to look at the discourses in context in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the conflict that existed between Jesus and the Pharisees. Since this research is about the application of hermeneutical principals in seeking to identify the false prophets of whom Jesus spoke, it is necessary to devote some time to the history of the Pharisees and oral tradition. This history of the Pharisees for purposes of this study culminates in the events that transpired in Jamnia about 90 CE.

PHARISEES AND ORAL TRADITION

> Orthodox Judaism is not simply "Old Testament theology without Jesus." It is the religion of "You have heard it said." This was Jesus' repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the Talmud.[31]

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Blomberg says, "According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers."[32] Elwell and Yarbrough point out that the name "'Pharisee' probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning 'separate'; hence, the Pharisees were 'the separate ones.'"[33] Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Blair calls attention to the strong influence that the Pharisees had among the Israelites.[34] It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that individuals rely upon for their information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus help to shed light on Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about 200 C.E.[35] The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his Antiquities of the Jews, written ca. 94 CE, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

> What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.[36]

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written law. As Murphy has written, "The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations."[37] The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the "tradition of the elders." Matthew preserves this encounter:

> Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of

> your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: '"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (**Matthew 15:1-9**).

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand.[38] Josephus wrote about an incidence that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BCE to 4 CE) which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time.

> (41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them.[39]

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), Atistobulus I (104-103 BCE), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE).

> Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called 'the oral Torah." They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation's religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.E., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well.[40]

NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, one must not study Phariseeism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (**Matthew 5:21**). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount,

dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. Davies aptly stresses the meaning of "You have heard" in his analysis of three passages in Matthew (**12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-19**).[41] In the first citation (**12:1-14**), Jesus discusses the Pharisees' oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (**15:1-20**), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (**19:1-19**), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (**7:15**). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, "the SM itself is not set forth as a 'new', revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai."[42] Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the "You have heard" but "I tell you" is Jesus' ethical demands set over against those of Judaism.[43] North also states the matter firmly: "The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus' use of the technique, 'You have heard it said.' What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text."[44]

Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, "Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions."[45] Hagner also notes that "By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus' exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments."[46]

The oral Torah was not codified until ca. 200 CE.[47] North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,[48] which is the codification of the oral Torah,[49] that there are contradictions between the written Torah and the oral Torah. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: "The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE. . . . 'Oral' is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies."[50]

The Pharisees were in revolt against God's written law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God's law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the

> gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean (**Matthew 23:15-27**).

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the "You have heard" (oral Torah) with "but I say unto you" (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel's religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE—upon the meaning of "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." His commentary is a classic example of "You have heard." The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar's commentary: "R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve."[51] If Matthew had recorded this saying, one could also find Jesus' "but I say unto you": "Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death" (**Exodus 22:19**).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

> Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.[52]

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on

Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees: "Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God (**12:42-43**).[53]

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (**Philippians 3:4-6**).[54] Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke names is Paul; Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul's conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 8:1**). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the "Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia" (**6:9**).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (**Titus 1:11**). Paul tells Titus that

> They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (**1:11-16**).

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (**Acts 15:1**). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (**15:4**). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports, "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" (**15:5**). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

POST-70 CE AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and

the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.[55] After 70 CE, the terms "Pharisee" and "scribe" drop out of common usage and is replaced with "rabbi." The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea, and began studying the Torah.[56]

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia.[57] The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important roll that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

> What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.[58]

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that "It was the pharisaic interpretation of the law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis."[59] The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

> Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple's destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could take its place. [60]

Sanders' writings also collaborate the findings of Rosenberg: "The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole period 175 BCE to 135 CE the populace basically followed the Pharisees."[61] This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps one to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term "false prophets" refer in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5—7**) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel (**Matthew 23**) and in His Eschatological Discourse (**Matthew 24**).

JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of 85—100 CE for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew.[62] This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. 90 CE. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew's

purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: "It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for supposition."[63] It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew's Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus. But in this identity, Matthew records many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.[64]

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.[65] One cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

> After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.[66]

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Pharisaism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.[67] The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus' ministry; they never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: "After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name, becoming more catholic, and taking the title 'rabbis', 'teachers'."[68]

CONCLUSION

This analysis of the principles of interpretation has sought to make interpreters conscious of how prior understanding can affect one's current understanding of Scripture. All Christians who open God's Word and read it bring with them the forestructures of their lives formed by their history, their language, and their culture in which they live, therefore it is imperative upon every reader to capture the original intent of the author. Since no one can approach the text without presuppositions, then one must exercise every safeguard to interpret the Word of God correctly.

In addition, this investigation of how to read the Word of God more accurately has only skimmed the surface in the area of interpretation to set the stage for an identification of the false prophets in **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**. The objective of this examination of the principles of interpretation applied has been to help Christians to continue to correctly

handle the Word of truth (**2. Timothy 2:15**).

Since the Gospel of Matthew is a story, that is to say, a narrative about the life of Jesus, then the next study in the examination of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew presents a brief overview of the Gospel of Matthew as narrative in order to grasp more fully the principles of interpretation in identifying false prophets in Matthew's Gospel. An understanding of narrative studies should help one in reading Matthew's Gospel. In order to ascertain the identity of the false prophets with whom Jesus and Matthew had dispute, then an awareness of plot (story line) in narrative studies should help one to correctly classify the phony prophets in **Matthew 7:15** and **24:11, 24**. This chapter discusses in detail the benefits of narrative studies in seeking a correct application or interpretation of any individual text or texts. The following remarks by Hirsch sums up the need for consulting the author as to the intended meaning to be assigned to any text:

> Once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. By an inner necessity the study of "what a text says" to an individual critic. It became fashionable to talk about a critic's "reading" of a text, and this word began to appear in the titles of scholarly works. The word seemed to imply that if the author had been banished, the critic still remained, and his new, original, urbane, ingenious, or relevant "reading" carried its own interest.[69]

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[1] For an insightful article on preunderstanding, see Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 14-22.

[2] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 14.

[3] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[4] Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97. This in-depth study on hermeneutics applies the hermeneutic circle in order to identify the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation; Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

[7] See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72,73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

[8] See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

[9] L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 12.

[10] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook, Revised Edition (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23*..

[11] Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20. See Dallas Burdette's website: www.freedominchrist.net for an examination of this principle, "Passover Traditions in the First Century," for an example of the application of the above principles—"linguistic, cultural, and historical background," located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under LORD'S SUPPER.

[12] Berkhof, *Interpretation*, 28-29.

[13] See Hayes and Holladay, *Exegesis*, 66, where they write:

> The best guide to the meaning of a word is the context in which it is used. This means, first of all, the immediate context of the passage in which it occurs. If a word has several meanings, one should explore the range of meanings and see how they fit or do not fit in the context. A broader context is the whole of the document in which the terms appear. One should explore how a term is used and what it denotes elsewhere in the document.

[14] Johnson, *Interpretation*, 45.

[15] Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172.

[16] Fish does not use "interpretative community" but "interpretive community."

[17] Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

> An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s, deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[18] Ibid., 335.

[19] See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[20] Ibid., 31.

[21] For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975) : 68-71.

[22] See Johnson, *Interpretation* , 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[23] For an excellent presentation of this concept, see Gonzalez and Gonzalez, "Difficulties in Hearing the Text," in *Preaching*, 29-47.

[24] Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[25] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[26] Garrett, "It Means What It Says," 69.

[27] For an in-depth study of the cliché, see Dallas Burdette, "We Speak Where the Bible Speaks" [ONLINE], available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 8 July 2004] located under the caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the

subheading HERMENEUTICS.

[28] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, "The Narrow Gate" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[29] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, "Judge Not" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[30] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, "The Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline Accounts" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE.

[31] Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[32] Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[33] Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: "They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.), Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees' activities during the time of Jonathan (B. C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[34] Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

[35] See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

> The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted

> the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi ("prince," or "patriarch"), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then in about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* ("repetition"). The Mishna, based upon the laws of the Hebrew Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

[36] See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews,* Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

[37] Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

[38] See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he has an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

> We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, some time in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

[39] Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

[40] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about "ever-increasing complexity" reminds one of Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees: They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4)."

[41] W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

[42] Ibid., 31.

[43] Ibid., 87.

[44] North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics,* expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, "These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter."

[45] Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

[46] Donald A. Hagner, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

[47] See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

[48] This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

[49] North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

> The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.
>
> This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

[50] C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[51] See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a* , in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka's Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost $299.00, [accessed 8 July 2004]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his book, *Ibid., 84-105.*

[52] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

[53] See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

[54] See **also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12**.

[55] Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.

[56] Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians,* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[57] Scheindlin*, Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, "Johanan ben Zakkai," in *Judaism*, 88.

[58] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

[59] Lavinia, "Pharisee," in *Judaism*, 134.

[60] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[61] Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[62] See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

[63] D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[64] Carson, "Matthew," in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[65] Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[66] Ibid.. 234.

[67] Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[68] Ibid., 412.

[69] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 3.

The Present Crisis Within the Churches of Christ

Thrust Statement: **Misunderstanding of the Word of God does not, in and of itself, constitute one a false prophet.**

Scripture Reading: **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 2 John 9**

Are Christians false teachers when they do not dot every "i" and cross every "t" the same as someone else? Should Christians cite **Matthew 7:15** against other sincere believers—individuals who have accepted Jesus as Lord in their lives and whose external behavior is in harmony with the Sermon on the Mount? Since **Matthew 7:15** is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to castigate other believers over biblical interpretations, one must seek to understand Jesus' use of this phrase in context. As stated in Part One of this series, the primary focus of this series centers around one of the three movements that originated within the Stone/Campbell Movement—the Churches of Christ. Many leaders within the Churches of Christ advance an illegal use of the three occurrences of this phrase, which misuse promotes division within the Body of Christ. Yet, this odd way of interpreting the "false prophets" passages is not unique to just one segment, or division, within the Churches of Christ; it is also found in other Christian fellowships under the banner, "Church of Christ." Why do so many sincere Christians continue to misapply God's Word against so many saints who also love the Lord and seek to do His will? The answer lies in how to interpret the Word of God. Countless Christians read the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters within their own distinctive fellowship. Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez go right to the heart of the matter when they write:

> One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything that was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of

the church made it difficult, if not impossible to read the Bible correctly.[1]

PRESENT CRISIS WITHIN SOME CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIPS

Tradition is still making it difficult for Christians to read the Bible correctly. As a result of the foothold that custom(s) has within many Churches of Christ, the churches as a whole are hopelessly divided over opinions. These divisions are deep and wide. Issues are so hotly debated that for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is to call down upon his/her head the epithet—false teacher. The lines of demarcation are tearing this distinctive fellowship into many warring factions, which movement started out to unite Christians in all the various denominations. The heart of all the confusion is over pattern theology, which focuses on the methodology of how to conduct a worship service on Sunday morning with its five acts. Each group basically has its own agenda. Those who refuse to conform to the exacting pattern of a particular fellowship are frequently branded with the epithet "false teachers."

This essay is a brief summary of the conflict within the Churches of Christ—especially within Montgomery, Alabama—in its identification of "false prophets" in Matthew's Gospel. Since this essay is dealing with conflict, this author has cited the writings of several godly men who think they are true to God with their system of theology. One of the authors cited in this work is O. B. Porterfield. These citations from his pen are not cited in order to castigate this brother in Christ, but rather the references to his various essays are given in order to draw a clear picture of the divisions within the Churches of Christ. This author also cites the writings of Ray Dutton in his castigation of Buddy Bell who is the current pulpit minister of the Landmark Church of Christ. The citations from his letters are not to call into question his honesty or integrity, but to illustrate the mind-set of one who thinks that he has have a handle on correct biblical interpretation, at least as the time of his tirade against another servant of the Most High God.

Country-wide Conflict

As stated above, this paper is not designed to haul over the coals those within the Churches of Christ, but it is written to alleviate, hopefully, so much division among Christians within this movement. This treatise is also written to support Christians in their endeavors to go back to the Bible in order to correct so much abuse toward other saints. Some Churches of Christ today are experiencing change that is causing some churches to level the harmful charge of false prophets against those who turn aside from long defended cherished traditions (traditionalism). Sometimes the label "change agents" is put forth in a derogatory sense in order to bring about rejection of the one who seeks change. The way this phrase is so loosely handled today, one could apply this phrase to Jesus as well as to all of His apostles. To many, within the Churches of Christ, this epithet has a sinister overtone. Today, as in the Reformation, one's heritage has made it difficult to interpret the written word accurately.

Christians must reexamine their traditions in light of God's Revelation. Traditions are often equated with the Word of God itself. Leroy Garrett points out that

> People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[2]

Innumerable Christians can no longer distinguish between the interpretation of the interpretative community and the Word of God itself. It is in this vein of orthodoxy that Stafford North, associated with Oklahoma Christian University of Science and Arts, forewarns against change, but this, too, is based upon his own interpretative community.[3] North points out in defense of his position that "Paul, John, Jesus and others in the New Testament forbid anyone to change or vary from this teaching. Jesus warned of false teachers and spoke of those in judgment who thought they were His but would be turned away because he 'never knew them'" (**Matthew 7:15-20**).[4]

North cites many Scriptures to justify his negative position of turnabout within the Churches of Christ. But upon closer analysis of the Scriptures he cites, the evidence does not appear to support his judgment of indictment. No one denies the Scriptures he relies upon to teach that one should not depart from the teachings of Jesus, but rather many Evangelical believers reject his application of those Scriptures to maintain the status quo within his interpretative community.

Each interpretative community advances its own brand of orthodoxy. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one postulating its own trademark of conformity. The history of the Churches of Christ is riddled with conflict and division over peripheral issues. It is in this same vein of disharmony within the Churches of Christ that Richard H. Niebuhr addresses the subject of hostility within Christendom itself. He is correct when he pungently captures the very essence of exclusiveness through teaching the history of the church.

> The teaching of church history is sometimes made the occasion for developing a sense of alienation from other groups rather than for developing a sense of unity. Like every other history, it is used at times to promote indoctrination in a peculiar tenet. Yet fundamentally and generally it is taught as church history. [5]

This alienation reached a climax for some within the Churches of Christ in the 1960s. In 1966, for instance, seventeen men and women voiced their concern for change within the Churches of Christ.[6] The concern of these Christians shook the establishment and reverberated throughout the Churches of Christ with fear of the unknown. Many were coming out of Plato's cave.[7] They were no longer seeing shadows, but they were seeing reality. Robert Myers in analyzing the tension build-up writes in his "Introduction" the following scenario that describes the purpose of the book:

> Some of us within the Church of Christ segment of the Restoration movement, and some recently out of it, have felt it imperative to analyze its failures. This anthology of essays is a criticism of a religious way of life. It is written by men who have remained within the Church of Christ, or by those who have felt they had to seek wider fellowship but still love dearly the people they left behind.[8]

Since the publication of *Voices of Concern*, many leaders have repudiated the narrow-mindedness within many Churches of Christ. And, as a result of rethinking ritualistic worship positions (five acts) once held, many are now advancing the concept that God has not ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts and also that God has a larger fellowship than just those within the Churches of Christ.[9] Thus, crises exist within the churches, and this call for change is working havoc among those who seek to stifle variation in the so-called worship service. But for those seeking more freedom in their gatherings, they often suffer ostracism by other Christians.[10] Neal Pryor, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Bible at Harding University, is correct when he writes: "There is hardly a congregation in our brotherhood that is not feeling the pressure for change. This trend can be a great benefit in that it calls us to re-examine what is really essential for us to keep and what are traditions that can and perhaps should be changed."[11]

Curtis Cates, Director of the Memphis School of Preaching and co-editor of *Yokefellow*, laments the fact that many within the Churches of Christ are no longer "set courageously for the defense of the Truth."[12] Again, he says, "Liberalism is an enemy of the light of God's Word, the absolute and knowable Truth (2 Tim. 3:14-17)."[13] He then identifies two men (Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris) within the Churches of Christ as associated with "the liberal, modernistic human philosophies"[14] These two men published a book to call attention to many of the traditions within the Churches of Christ that Christians should no longer adhere to.[15] Cates complains that "Brethren Harris and Shelly propose to give us 'a theology for the 21st century church' (p. xiii); they will 'reexamine the foundation' (p. xiv)."[16] Once more, he calls attention to the urgency of stopping "The mouths of false witnesses."[17] He believes that these two men are attacking the truth.[18] He then relies upon **2 John 9—11** to justify separation and ostracism from these two men.[19]

Two years after the publication of the above book, Cates wrote another book in which he refers to Shelly by citing the words of Jesus in **Matthew 7:15**: "Jesus warned, 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them' (Mat. 7:15-16)."[20] In 1990, C. Leonard Allen published a book[21] that also caused him to come under "fire" from Cates as a false prophet. Cates accuses Allen of disrespect for the Word and also charges him with treating the Word as "unrealistic" and "fairy tale-like":

> In other words, what brethren did was fairy tale-like and unrealistic; one cannot know what Truth is, and to think he can is to merely dream. Is that what Christ commanded when He said, "Beware of false prophets…" (Mat. 7:15), or when He warned, "But in vain do they worship me, Teaching [sic] as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mat. 15:9), or "Let them [false teachers and their religions] alone: they are blind guides" (Mat. 15:14), or what Paul meant when he charged, ". . . to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5).[22]

In 1996, Jim Waldron, another patternist, wrote an article in which he, too, took to task the theology of Shelly and Harris. He, too, bemoans the fact that the teachings of Shelly and Harris have infiltrated the mission fields.[23] He further castigates these men by citing articles by Choate,[24] also patternistic in his theology, in which he says,

> He is also demonstrating how false teachers in this generation are seeking to do

> the same thing in some of our schools. Also, the *Firm Foundation* has over the last five years documented much of the current digressive movement coming out of Abilene Christian University.[25]

This present crisis within the Churches of Christ involves the concept of pattern theology. Pattern theology, as stated above, is the belief that God has ordained a prescribed ritual to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner in order for there to be "worship in Spirit and truth." Waldron calls attention to ten men that do not advance the so-called five acts of worship, also known as pattern theology. Waldron, as he cites Choate, states the matter firmly:

> Brother Goebel Music in 1991 published *Behold The Pattern,* in which he meticulously documented the uncertain sounds of ten preachers and/or college professors. These men are: Max Lucado, San Antonio, Texas; Stephen Taylor, former professor of Abilene Christian University, who is now in England; Larry James, Plano, Texas; Rick Atchley, Fort Worth, Texas; Randy Fenter, San Antonio, Texas; Jim Hackney, Fort Worth, Texas; Jeff Walling, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Randy Mayeux, Dallas, Texas; Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tenn.; and Denny Boultinghouse, West Monroe, La.[26]

Just a perusal of the books and religious journals reveals the prevailing crisis that crystallizes around this expression (five acts): For example, Garland Elkins, Dean of Public Relations in the Memphis School of Preaching, asserts:

> There is a true worship. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Without hesitation, we affirm that worship to God under the New Testament consists of preaching (Acts 20:7), the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), and the giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2). These five acts are the only authorized acts of worship to God.[27]

LOCAL DISSENSION IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The Churches of Christ in Montgomery, AL are experiencing turmoil in unparalleled consequences—disunity. The former Seibles Road Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL published a bulletin weekly to call attention to apostasy—defection as defined by the then Seibles Road Church of Christ "interpretative community," which is still the consensus of many within the Churches of Christ (June 31, 2004). This bulletin printed (now defunct) articles by various authors to call attention to those who are so-called false prophets within the Churches of Christ. Since the now defunct Seibles road congregation is a part of the history of turmoil within the Christian community in Montgomery, AL, it seems appropriate to preserve for posterity the mind set of Porterfield and his writers—so many individuals with the same mind set who sought/seek to serve God, in spite of their factiousness.

The former minister, O. B. Porterfield[28] of the Seibles Road Church of Christ republished, in his November 3, 1996 bulletin an article written (originally written on September 25, 1996) by Ray Dutton, a former member of the Landmark Church of Christ. The Dutton article is prefaced with some remarks by O. B. Porterfield in which he reminds his readers that in May 1994 that he wrote about Buddy Bell and Joe Beam's appearance on Faulkner University's "Focus." His Preface is titled: "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery."[29] In this "Preface," he expresses sorrow that his efforts were futile. He could not prevent these two men from appearing on Faulkner University's lectureship.

In the third paragraph of Dutton's letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ, he says, "Recently, I became very upset about the scheduling of a known false teacher to speak to our young people."[30] Dutton, former pulpit minister in Montgomery, continues in this letter to speak of Bell's association with other known false teachers: "Though I was well aware that Buddy had a reputation for keeping company with a number of known false teachers, I had hoped that he was personally committed to the truth of God."[31] He then cites **Matthew 7:15** in warning the family at Landmark about Buddy Bell now minister of the Landmark congregation. He writes of the danger of the souls at the Landmark Church of Christ.

> I would give up my family at Landmark and never return if that alone would save the many precious souls here who are now gravely in danger from a man I now believe is a false teacher "secretly brought in" (Gal. 2:4), who has come to God's flock in "sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15) but is in truth a "ravenous wolf."[32]

Matthew 7:15 is cited by Dutton as applicable to Bell. Dutton relates a series of questions that he presented to Bell in order to elicit from him his feelings about "(1) 'BAPTISM,' (2) 'INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC and DENOMINATIONALISM,' (3) 'SOLOS, CHOIRS, QUARTETS AND OTHER SPECIAL MUSIC,' (4) 'THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH,' (5) 'HONESTY WITH THE BRETHREN,' AND (6) 'FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DENOMINATIONS.'"[33] As a result of this encounter, Dutton then cites **Titus 3:10** and combines this Scripture with **2 John 9—11** to justify his characterization of Bell as a false teacher.

Joe Beam,[34] another minister who calls for reflection upon traditionalism, came under attack again by Jerry C. Brewer. Brewer cited **Romans 16:17-18**, **2 John 9—11**, and **Ephesians 5:11** to uphold his belief that Beam is a false teacher.[35] Another Montgomery minister, Philip Black, minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ, also received a reprimand from Porterfield[36] and, at the same time, he also received the epithet of false teacher from Armond Hoover. Hoover expresses his concern over Black's influence within the Churches of Christ and then labels him as a false teacher.

> Your shallowness is showing, Brother Black. Brother O. B. and all other knowledgeable and understanding Christians know that only God can and will condemn the disobedient to His Will. However the righteous and obedient are commanded to (and will) warn and mark all false teachers and the disobedient (Rom. 16:17-18), beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15-16) (or be aware – A.H.). A warning, Grievous wolves (false teachers—A. H.) will enter among us, not sparing the flock, even our own selves to draw away (deceive – A.H.) disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).[37]

The third Church of Christ to come under attack in Montgomery, AL was the Vaughn Park Church of Christ. Mark Smith, at the time of the attack, was the pulpit minister for this congregation.[38] On July 13, 1997, Porterfield lashed out against all three congregations (Landmark, Carriage Hills, and Vaughn Park) for their participation in a lectureship called "Jubilee." He wrote: "BUDDY BELL, minister at Landmark, and PHILIP BLACK, minister at the F.O.G (Carriage Hills), were on the program and Vaughn Park advertised and encouraged people to attend this gathering of heretics."[39] In another bitter article, Porterfield cited **Matthew 7:15** as applicable to Mark Smith: "We proved his error by the scriptures. Matt. 7:1-5 condemns harsh judgment, but a judgment must be made according to Matt. 7:15-16. John 7:24 command [sic] righteous judgement according to the Word of

God, Psa. 119:172."[40]

These citations from the *Seibles Road Church of Christ* bulletin illustrate the crises that presently exist in the city of Montgomery, AL. I have reviewed the issues of this bulletin for the last two years, and almost without exception, every page of this paper summons the same Scriptures to justify separation from those who do not explain the Word of God as this particular "interpretative community," namely, the Seibles Road Church of Christ, presently interprets it. Even though this particular fellowship is no longer in existence, nevertheless, there are still congregations in the city of Montgomery that still cites the same Scriptures out of context to give credence to their sectarian views. This brief review of the contemporary situation of division within the Churches of Christ in Montgomery calls for a reexamination of how to interpret and understand Scripture in light of its context. In one's examination of one's beliefs, one must understand that God has never made one's salvation contingent upon perfection in knowledge. Alexander Campbell, too, faced the problem of knowledge in his own day concerning fellowship and unity among God's people:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[41]

CONCLUSION

This essay examined the controversy within the Churches of Christ as to who is or who is not a false prophet. Journals and books were called forth to illustrate the confusion that exists among so many devout Christians. It was observed that Christians often tag other Christians as misleading teachers when anyone dares to go against the grain of the intelligence of the religious leaders in certain "interpretative communities." Every Christian is confronted with the question: Is deformity in comprehension in and of itself sufficient grounds for the epithet of false prophet? One must determine who is and who is not a counterfeit teacher from Scripture, not tradition.

The question is, Is one a sham teacher simply because one believes in instrumental

music, handclapping in the assembly, solo singing, Sunday schools, individual communion cups, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on? Since Jesus warns against imitation prophets (**Matthew 7:15**, **24:11,24**), then believers do have a responsibility to identify those who come under this classification. One must recognize a false teacher through a correct application of Scripture, not through the traditions of men. The Word of God alone is the criterion that can assist one in making this determination.

The perusals of the various Church of Christ journals revealed that certain Scriptures were relied upon to justify separation from other believers. Two Scriptures cited were **2 John 9**[42] and **Matthew 7:15**. Many writers, in order to uphold their practice of ostracism, cited these verses to justify their narrow perception of fellowship among other Christians. Charles W. Foreman sets forth the idea that "the divine basis for human unity is not a very popular point of view."[43] The lines of demarcation are tearing this denomination[44] (Churches of Christ) into many warring factions. Unfortunately, the word *denomination* is a word that is generally employed toward other religious bodies outside the Stone/Campbell Movement. In an essay such as this, one is reluctant to employ the word *denomination* with reference to the Churches of Christ. Yet, if Christians understood this term in its proper usage, there would not be the turmoil that presently exists within the fellowship of Christians. How can Christians stand united? Listen once more to Foreman:

> When we want to establish unity in our own way, we need to remember that it is the pride which is the thing that divides and alienates men. We see it all around us in our daily life. When men are proud, they become stiff, so stiff that they clash whenever they touch each other, so stiff that they cannot bend over in forgiveness. When they are without forgiveness, there is nothing for them to do but make continuous demands on each other and fall into recriminations when those demands are not fulfilled. So out of their pride their unity is destroyed. Only when pride gives way to humility and forgiveness can unity grow.[45]

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[1] Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 29.

[2] Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[3] For an interpretation of the "interpretative community," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171, where he says,

> Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. . . . The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in

> turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.

[4] Stafford North, "How To Be Undenominational In A Denominational World," in Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, eds., *Directions for the Road Ahead: Stability in Change Among Churches of Christ* (Chickasha, Oklahoma: Yeomen Press, 1998), 207.

[5] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 15.

[6] Robert Meyers, ed., *Voices of Concern* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1966).

[7] Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic,* translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 255-264; see also David Melling, *Understanding Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-113.

[8] Myers, *Voices of Concern*, 1.

[9] For an excellent discussion of the so-called five acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman, see Buff Scott. Jr., "Acts of Worship," *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1993): 3-7. See also Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992); Mike Root, *UnBroken Bread: Healing, Worship, Wounds* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1997).

[10] See, for example, Don L. King, " Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where he expresses his rejection of those who do not conform to his interpretative community's stance on one-cup and non-Sunday school beliefs.

> Why do we worship with one cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful, to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one cup violates the examples given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did, "this do ye…." (1 Corinthians 11:25), etc., etc. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. If it is wrong to use more than one cup in the Lord's Supper I can't worship with those who use more than one. If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? [sic].

[11] Neale T. Pryor, "The Essentials of the Faith: What Cannot Change," in *Church Unity: Stability & Flexibility in the Church*, 1995 Preacher's Forum, Harding University, Graduate School of Religion, ed. Donald Kinder (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1995), 33.

[12] Curtis Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis,

Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1992), 18.

[13] Ibid., 19.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

[16] Cates, *Incarnation*, 20.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 25-27. For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 26 January 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and, then, under the subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES**;** For a an excellent and detailed study on 2 John 9, see also Carl Ketcherside, "Receive Him Not," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 81-90.

[20] Curtis Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted: Shall We Have a New "Cultural Church"?* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1994), 15.

[21] C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

[22] Cates, *Concept Refuted,* 38, 39.

[23] Jim Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," *Firm Foundation* 111, no. 9 (September 1996): 13.

[24] For an example of the five-acts of worship by Choate, see J. C. Choate, *Gospel Sermonnettes* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 1993) , 102-104.

[25] Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," Firm *Foundation*, 13. For additional reading in this same vein, see Jim Laws, Lectureship director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); and William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ: A Study In Contemporary problems With Change Agents Among Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994).

[26] Ibid. For a detailed study and approval of this concept of pattern theology (five

acts), see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, Texas: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 393-394. See also Cates, *Incarnation*, 27-28.

[27] Garland Elkins, "Foreword," in Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 12-13.

[28] Since the publication of this News Letter, Porterfield has resigned from his preaching ministry because of poor health. Also, the congregation that he labored with for many years ceased to exist as a local congregation. I understand that the few members that were left placed membership with other congregation of the same mind-set.

[29] O. B. Porterfield, "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[30] Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 2. This congregation still comes under attack from other Christians over Landmark's more open stance concerning Christian fellowship.

[33] Ibid., 3.

[34] Joe Beam was a former pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ—now called Family of God (F.O.G.)—in the city of Montgomery, AL.

[35] Jerry C. Brewer, "Oklahoma Brethren Issue Warning That Is On The 'Beam,'" Seibles *Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (February 2, 1997): 2.

[36] O. B. Porterfield, "A Reader Responds And Speaks Out!," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (January 19, 1997): 1. Philip Black is no longer the pulpit minister for this congregation; he is now an elder in this local body of believers known as Grace Pointe.

[37] Armond Hoover, "Dear Philip Black," Ibid., 2. This article also criticizes unity in diversity and recommends Goebel Music's book, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991). For a counter position of Hoover's negative statements about unity in diversity, see Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 97-112 [1-16].

[38] See David Hester, "OFF THE MARK," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (May 18, 1997): 1 for his castigation of Mark Smith as a false teacher as well as a host of others labeled as false teachers.

[39] This commentary (comments) by Porterfield is written in support of an article written by Robert Dodson, "The Move to Unite With Denominationalists," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (July 13, 1997): 2.

[40] These comments are in response to an article written by Clifton D. Kelly, "Worrying Too Much About Error? *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (December 21, 1997): 2. See also Dallas Burdette, "Judge Not," [ON-LINE] for an examination of this much-abuse Scripture (Matthew 7:1). Available from www.freedominchrit.net [accessed 26 June 2004], located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS, and then under subheading MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES.

[41] Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

[42] See Dallas Burdette, "Doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9: Subjective or Objective Genitive?—for an example of context interpretation [ON-LINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed 26 June 2004], located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS, then under MISAPPLIED SCRIPTURES. For an opposing view, see C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5; Mike McDanie, "The Right Hand of Fellowship," part 2, *The Light* 27, no. 1 (January 1996): 3-6; Carl Johnson, "The Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 2 (February 1996): 1, 7-8; James Meadows, "Does the New Testament Represent a Pattern to Follow?" *Firm Foundation* 110, no. 12 (December 1995): 8-10; Stan Cox, "Is Sincerity Sometimes Enough?" *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 8 (April 20, 1995): 21-22; Tom M. Roberts, "Romans 14: Satan's Trojan Horse for Fellowship with Error," *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 4 (February 16, 1995): 110-113 [12-17]; Don Walker, "Second John 9 in Light of Context," *The Restorer* (May/June 1989): 11-14; Jerry Moffitt, "Why I Don't Have Fellowship With Denominational 'Pastors' and Catholic Priests," *Contending for the Faith* XXVI, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 3-6; William Woodson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *The Spiritual Sword* 22, no. 3 (April 1991): 35-38; Roy Deaver, "Who 'Splits the Log'?" *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983):11-13; Garland Elkins, "'Receive Him Not'—II John 9-11," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no. 2 (January 1974): 31-34.

[43] Charles W. Foreman, *A Faith for the Nations* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 30.

[44] Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement, he wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . .

. We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," ***Millennial Harbinger,*** New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

[45] Foreman, *A Faith for the Nations*, 31.

Jesus Died That We Might Live Through Him

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the propiation for our sins.**

Scripture Reading: **1 John 4:9-10; Ephesians 2:4-5**

As one reflects upon the death of Christ, one is confronted with one of the greatest mysteries of all times. The death of Christ, to some extent, is a paradox—He died that we might live. The death of Jesus is the greatest example of love known to humanity—God became flesh. The Cross of Jesus is upon the lips of every Christian. What does the death of Jesus mean to you? Do you reject His death for your salvation? Do you crucify the Son of God afresh by your rejection of Him in your daily walk? Have you allowed the death of Jesus to mold your everyday actions toward God and toward others? Do you accept God's analysis of the plight of humanity—"dead in your transgressions and sins" (**Ephesians 2:1**).[1]

Many individuals fail to see their dilemma—dead in transgressions and sins. When one is without Christ, he or she is dead. Every person who is separated from Christ is excluded from citizenship in heaven, foreigners from God's new covenant of promise, without hope, and without God in the world. Paul, in seeking to capture the plight of humanity without God and Christ, expresses the utter hopelessness of one without God and one without Christ:

> 11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is

> our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. [17] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. [19] Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. [21] In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. [22] And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (**Ephesians 2:11-22**).

In this Epistle, Paul describes those without Christ as dead in their sins. But, if one is willing to accept Jesus as the Savior of the world, then He will make one alive. He died in order that we might live through Him. During the Last Supper, Jesus again calls attention to His death for the forgiveness of sins: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**). One can hardly reflect upon this statement by Jesus without reflection upon the words of Isaiah:

> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. [6] We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (**Isaiah 53:5-6**).

The Holy Spirt says that as a result of His punishment, God brought peace to sinful humanity. It is the death of Christ upon the Cross that we are healed. Jesus, too, speaks of this death in His remarks to Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (**John 3:16-18**).

Did Jesus refer to His crucifixion in this statement concerning God sending His "one and only Son" for the salvation of mankind? Listen to the remarks of Jesus preceding this most revealing statement about salvation: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, [15] that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (**3:14-15**). Yes, Jesus speaks of His death through crucifixion. Even before this revelation to Nicodemus, Jesus spoke of His death in His remarks to the Jews when they questioned Him about His authority to discipline them about their

activities in the Temple (**2:12-16**). In the course of their questioning Him, they requested a sign from Him to demonstrate His right to act in this manner. Jesus responded by saying: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (**2:19**).

The Jews did not understand His remarks. They thought He had reference to the Temple built by Herod, which took forty-six years to build (**2:20**), but John adds the following comment to call attention to the nature of this prophecy: " But the temple he had spoken of was his body" (**2:21**). Even though the disciples heard this saying, nevertheless, it was not until after the crucifixion that this declaration to the Jews became clear to the chosen twelve. Listen to John the apostle as he explains: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (**2:22**). This is the historical background to statements made to Nicodemus. Paul comprehended this background; he understood that Jesus died that we might live through Him. Paul, several years after his conversion, wrote to the Romans about the necessity of the death of Jesus:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

It is in this same vein that Paul wrote to the Colossians about Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement:

> Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. [22] But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (**Colossians 1:21-22**).

Again, Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (**Ephesians 2:13-16**).

The author of Hebrews also understood that Jesus died that we might live through him. He wrote:

> For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (**Hebrews 9:15**).

Yes, Jesus died as a ransom to set us free from sin. Peter, too, expresses the truth that Christ died that we might live through Him: "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (**1 Peter 3:18**). Once more, John the apostle expresses it this way:

> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. [2] He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (**1 John 2:1-2**).

In this same Epistle, one can see John as he recalls what he had written earlier when he recorded the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (**John 3:1-21**). He gives an excellent commentary on the remarks of Jesus to Nicodemus in his first of three short Epistles (**2: 18-22; 3:16-17**):

> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. [10] This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (**1 John 4:9-10**).

Without Christ, there is no salvation. Peter expresses salvation this way: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**Acts 4:12**). Prior to the crucifixion, Jesus spoke to Martha concerning the death of her brother Lazarus: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; [26] and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (**John 11:25**). Jesus said what no one else could say. Not only did He say, "I am the resurrection and the life," but He also said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**14:6**). Jesus does not just simply give life; He is life. John in his first Epistle writes:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. [2] The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us (**1 John 1:1-2**).

John understood Jesus is eternal life. In his Gospel, he wrote: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (**John 1:4**). John knew that if one wants eternal life, he or she must accept Jesus as God's Way of salvation. Listen to John once more as he seeks to convey this message about Jesus: "And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] He who has the Son has life; he who does not

have the Son of God does not have life" (**1 John 5:11-12**). This is why it is imperative that one accepts Jesus as the savior of the world. He died that we might live through Him.

Following this incident of Jesus' conversation with Martha about her brother Lazarus, Philip and Andrew conveyed a request from some from the town of Bethsaida in Galilee to see Jesus (**John 12:22**), Jesus responded by discussing His death. In the course of this conversation, He once more referred to His death on the cross: "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. [32] But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (**12:31-32**). Again, one is confronted with the teaching that Jesus died that we might live through Him.

CONCLUSION

Is it any wonder that Paul cries out: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**Galatians 6:14**). As pointed out earlier, the fundamental problem of lost sinners is that they are dead in transgressions and sins. Only God can make one alive, but God does this through Jesus Christ. You must experience resurrection to have eternal life. We have all sinned and come short of God's glory. What is the answer? It is Jesus! Jesus is the One that was slain from the creation of the universe for the sins of humanity (see **Romans 13:8**; **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:5**). Again, one must cry out: Jesus died that we might live through Him.

> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. [10] This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (**1 John 4:9-10**).

[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

b Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away*

Jesus' View of the Cross: Slain From the Creation of the World

Thrust Statement: **Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God slain from the creation of the world.**

Scripture Reading: **Mark 10:45; Revelation 13:8; Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20**

As one reflects upon the Cross of Christ, one is immediately confronted with a love that defies comprehension in its fulness. The Cross of Jesus is an excellent commentary on the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (**John 3:16**).[1] What does the Cross of Jesus mean to you? Was the Cross of Christ an afterthought on the part of God? Was the Cross of Christ the intentional will of God? In other words, was it God's intentional will from the beginning of creation of the world that Christ should go to the cross as a sacrificial lamb to be slain for the sins of humanity?

In 1944, Leslie D. Weatherhead (1893-1976) delivered a series of five lectures on "The Will of God."[2] Overall this book is an excellent treatment on the will of God. But, having said that, one must read parts of this book with extreme care and caution. In this short book (55 pages), he advances the notion that the Cross of Christ was not a part of the "intentional" will of God. Without any proof to verify his presupposition, he writes,

> Was it God's intention from the beginning that Jesus should go to the Cross? I think the answer to that question must be No. I don't think Jesus thought that at the beginning of his ministry. He came with the intention that men should follow him, not kill him.[3]

Just a perusal of the Scriptures refutes this statement by Weatherhead. In spite of Weatherhead's sincerity and scholarship, the Word of God sets forth the idea that the Cross of Christ was not an afterthought on the part of God nor was it a human accident.

John, who wrote five books of the New Testament, records an insightful note about the Cross and crucifixion of Jesus that refutes any notion that the crucifixion of Jesus came about as an afterthought on the part of God, or, in the words of Weatherhead, the "circumstantial will of God."[4]

Listen to John as he speaks of the Lamb of God as having been slain from the creation of the world: "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (**Revelation 13:8**). The KJV reads: "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world".[5] Even before the universe was spoken into existence, it was decreed that the Son should die for the sins of the world. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, addresses the crucifixion this way: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (**Acts 2:23**). Again, some years later, Peter addresses God's elect concerning the death of Jesus this way:

> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, [19] but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. [20] He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. [21] Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (**1 Peter 1:18-21**).

In Peter's first epistle (early 60s), he sets forth the idea that God knew beforehand—before the creation of the world—that it would be necessary for Christ to redeem fallen humanity through His death upon the Cross. The Cross of Christ was not the "circumstantial will of God," but rather the "intentional will of God." Paul, too, confirms the words of Peter in his Epistle to the Ephesians (early 60s). In this Book, Paul unfolds this "mystery of his will" (**1:9**) hidden from ages past (**3:9**). In the unfolding of this "mystery," he writes: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**1:4**). This "administration of God's grace" (**3:2**) is also expressed as "the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly" (**3:3**). This mystery involved the creation of a new humanity in which both Jew and Gentile would be reconciled unto God in "one body" "through the cross" (**2:16**). Once more, how did God accomplish this feat? For Paul, God brought this about through the Cross of Christ:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. [17] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (**2:14-18**).

Whenever one speaks of the Cross of Christ, one speaks of the Gospel of Christ, which is the "mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things" (**3:9**). Yet again, Paul speaks of this "mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (**Colossians 1:27**). Is it any wonder that Paul cries out: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**Galatians 6:14**). Paul never tires of calling attention to the redemption of men and women as having existed in the mind of God even before the creation of the world. Paul, in his short letter to Titus (written probably between AD 63/65) writes:

> Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— [2] a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, [3] and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior (**Titus 1:1-3**).

Jesus' Perception of His Death

The hope that men and women have today rests upon the promise of God "before the beginning of time." God could accomplish this hope only "in" and "through" Christ. When Christ came into this world, He had a consciousness of His mission—death on the Cross for the sins of humanity. As one reflects upon Jesus' own understanding of His death, one finds some insight by reading the narrative about two men walking on the road to Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (**Luke 24:13**). This event took place on the day of the Resurrection of Jesus (**24:13**). One discovers from Jesus' conversation with these two men that neither individual believed the prophets who foretold about the sufferings of Christ (**24:17-24**). Jesus rebukes these men for their refusal to believe:

> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (**24:25-26**).

Following these comments by Jesus, Luke informs Theophilus (**1:3**) that Jesus explained the events concerning Himself, as revealed by the Scriptures, by "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets" (**24:27**). Luke informs his reader that after Jesus ate with these men from Emmaus (**24:30**), these two disciples went to Jerusalem and found the Eleven and those with them (**24:33**). While together, Jesus suddenly appeared among them all (**24:36**). Again, one encounters disbelief on the part of the gathered disciples (**24:38**). Following this incident, Jesus, as he had done earlier with the two men from Emmaus, unfolded the words of the "Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (**24:44**) concerning His mission and suffering on the Cross:

> This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things (**24:46-48**).

The death of Christ upon the cross was within the divine will of God the Father as well as the divine will of Jesus. His death was a necessity for the salvation of men and women. Jesus voluntarily laid down His life in order to accomplish the eternal plan of God. John records a conversation about this death in the very words of the Master Himself:

> I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— [15] just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. [16] I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. [17] The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

In the final phase of Jesus' earthly ministry, He informed His disciples about His impending death in Jerusalem (**Mark 10:33-34**; see also **Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**). Following the announcement of His death, the disciples got into a rather heated argument over who was the greatest. This controversy erupted over a request made my James and John (**Mark 10:35-41**). In this discussion, Jesus intervened and explained how to be great in His kingdom. But the last words of Jesus in this pericope (The Request of James and John, **10:35-45**), Jesus reveals His objective in coming into the world. In this startling statement, He unfolds His purpose: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**10:45**). Thus, in a sense, Jesus was slain from the creation of the world. Jesus came into the world to give His life as a ransom for the sins of the world. Yes, one can say that it was God's "intentional" will that Jesus should die as "a ransom for the sins of the world."

The Old Testament Prophecies

Warren W. Wiersbe is correct when he writes: "The cross was a divine assignment, not a human accident; it was a God-given obligation, not a human option."[6] The Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice—Jesus the savior of the world. By His death upon the cross, Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system and put an end to it. As one reflects upon the shedding of the blood of Christ upon the cross, one can hardly fail to recall the words of Moses as recorded in **Leviticus 17:11**: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." It is in this vein that the author of Hebrews writes:

> It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. [24] For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. [25] Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his

own. [26] Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself (**Hebrews 9:23-26**).

Through a system of sacrifices, God gave Israel a shadow of His plan of redemption for lost humanity. For God to accomplish a true atonement for the sins of mankind, He prepared a body for this final sacrifice—one of the Trinity. The author of Hebrews gives a statement made by Jesus concerning His body prepared for this ultimate sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; [6] with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. [7] Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—have come to do your will, O God.'" [8] First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). [9] Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. [10] And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (**Hebrews 10:5-10**).

No wonder John informs his readers: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**). Jesus gave Himself as the burnt offering in order to make atonement—pay the price—for the offenses against God. The death of Jesus fulfilled the entire sacrificial system and put an end to the sacrificial system set up by God through Moses. He accomplished what the blood of bulls and goats could not do, that is, "take away sins" (**Hebrews 10:4**). John the Baptist, as far as we know, was the first one to announce the sacrificial death of Jesus: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29**). By His death upon the Cross, Jesus put an end to the old system of sacrifices for ever.

Baptism of Jesus

As one continues to seek to understand the "intentional" will of God, the baptism of Jesus also helps to unfold this divine mystery hidden from ages past. Does the baptism of Jesus also prefigure the "intentional" will of God concerning the crucifixion? The baptism of Jesus is not commonly pictured as a symbol of His impending death, but, on the other hand, one cannot help but wonder if the baptism of Jesus did not represent His sacrificial death. John knew that this One coming to be baptized was not One who stood in need of repentance. At first, John refused to baptize Jesus but consented at the insistence of Jesus. Jesus let John know upfront that it was necessary: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (**Matthew 3:15**). Jesus knew that this baptism was His Father's will. The question that confronts every believer is: To whom does the "us" refer? The following comments by Warren w. Wiersbe are well worth citing in full:

We read these words casually, but they raise some difficult questions. To whom does the pronoun "us" refer? Does it include John? If it does, then we have a problem explaining how a sinful man could help a holy God "fulfill all righteousness." One solution is to forget John and note that the entire Godhead was involved in this important event. God the Father spoke from heaven; God the Son went into the water, and God the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove. Doesn't this suggest that "us" refers to the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Isn't it God who fulfills all righteousness by giving his Son as a sacrifice for the sins of the world?

The New American Standard Bible translates Matthew 3:15 "for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." In what way? In the way illustrated by his baptism: death, burial, and resurrection. In fact, Jesus used baptism as a picture of his passion: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50). He also identified himself with the experience of John (Matt. 12:38-40; Luke 11:30), and again we see the image of the death, burial, and resurrection.[7]

Death of Christ

As one peruses the Gospel of John, one quickly discovers that the sacrificial lamb is just one of several pictures of Christ's death. Immediately following John the Baptist's remarks about the Lamb of God (**John 1:29, 36**), John, the apostle, gives the comments of Jesus concerning His death, which reveals quite tellingly Jesus' view of the Cross: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (**John 2:19**). Prior to this statement, Jesus and His disciples had gone to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover (**2:15**). Upon their arrival, Jesus became infuriated with individuals who had made the house of God a den of thieves. As a result of this encounter, Jesus "scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables" (**2:15**). These individuals wanted to know by what authority He did this (**2:18**). But in their request about this authority, the Jews wanted to know what miraculous sign He could do to prove that He had the authority to run them out of the Temple (**2:18**). This request precipitated his remarks about destroying this temple (**2:19**). After the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle remembered these words: "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" (**2:22**).

Again, John records for his readers a third reference to the sacrificial death of Jesus upon the Cross. Jesus talks with Nicodemus about His crucifixion. In this conversation Jesus says: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, [15] that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life" (**3:14-15**). The verb "lifted up" (υΣοψω, jj&uyow) has a dual meaning in John—(1) lifting up on the Cross, and (2) exaltation to heaven. For example, in **John 8:28**, Jesus says: ""When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." On the other hand, one discovers that this verb may also have reference to the glorification of Christ: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (**12:32**). The Cross was not the end of His glory, but it was the means of His glory. It is in this vein that Peter proclaims: "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (**Acts**

2:33).

Just as the serpent was lifted up on a pole (see **Numbers 21:5-9**), so the Son of Man was lifted up on a cross to save us from sin and death. By looking on Jesus Christ through faith, we, too, can be delivered from death. On the cross, Jesus became a curse for us in order to redeem us from the curse of the law (**Galatians 3:13**). It was the substitionary death of Jesus that brought about deliverance from death. The Jews had a difficult time understanding how the Messiah could be crucified. Listen once more to a conversation between Jesus and the crowd:

> But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." [33] He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. [34] The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" (**John 12:32-34**).

The Jews recalled the words of Moses:

> If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, [23] you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance (**Deuteronomy 21:22-23**).

How could He "remain forever" and, at the same time, be crucified? The cross of Christ was a mystery. Jesus was like the serpent lifted up. He was like a criminal cursed upon a tree. Paul expresses the dilemma this way to the Corinthians: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (**2 Corinthians 5:21**).

Jesus did not speak openly about his death until after Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi (**Matthew 16:13-21**). Peter upon hearing the words of Jesus about His impending death took Him aside and rebuked the Master (**16:22**). Following Peter's outburst of surprise, Jesus rebuked him for not thinking the things of God (**16:23**). The death of Christ was a necessity for the salvation of humanity. The death of Christ had been decreed before the "creation of the world." The disciples were stunned at such an announcement of His impending death. Following the Mount of Transfiguration (**17:1-8**), Jesus, for a second time, announced His death (**17:22-23**). While on the Mount, God spoke directly from heaven and added something that He had not added earlier in His first announcement (**3:17**) at the Baptism of Jesus—"Listen to him" (**17:5**). The following is a chart of these two episodes:

Matthew 3:17	**Matthew 17:5**
And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."	While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

God wanted the disciples of Jesus to pay attention to the words of Jesus concerning His death. Yet again, in **Matthew 20:17-19**, Jesus speaks of His death:

> Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, [18] "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death [19] and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

Even to the very end, the disciples did not comprehend the significance of the events Jesus forewarned them about. Right up to the bitter end, Peter was still willing to fight to prevent the crucifixion.

> While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. [48] Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." [49] Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. [50] Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. [51] With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. [52] "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. [53] Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?" (**Matthew 26:47-54**).

CONCLUSION

Was the crucifixion of Jesus the "intentional" will of God? One can say an emphatic "yes" to the question! The Scriptures foretold of this event; therefore, the death of Christ had to occur. It is through the cross of Jesus that God has secured salvation for all who believe. Is it any wonder that Paul cried out: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (**Galatians 6:14**). Do you boast in the cross of Christ as the means of your salvation? Or do you boast in your own good works for salvation? Is it any wonder that Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, exalted the cross as the basis of one's salvation? Listen to him as he captures the wonder of it all:

> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**).

The cross of Christ was not the "circumstantial" will of God, but rather, the "intentional" will of God. Jesus came to die that through His death we might live. Jesus was slain from the beginning of the creation (**Revelation 13:8**) for the sins of humanity. The following words of the apostle Peter tell it all:

> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. [21] Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (**1 Peter 1:20-21**).

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2] Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Will of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944).

[3] Ibid., 12; see also pp. 20 and 32.

[4] See Ibid., 12, where he writes concerning his concept of the "circumstantial will of God":

> But when circumstances wrought by men's evil set up such a dilemma that Christ was compelled either to die or to run away, then *in those circumstances* the Cross was the will of God, but only in those circumstances which were themselves the fruit of evil.

[5] *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, c1982).

[6] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Cross of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). I am indebted to Wiersbe for the flow of my thoughts in this sermon.

[7] Wiersbe, *The Cross of Jesus*, 14.

The Folly and Scandal of the Cross

Thrust Statement: **God comes to the world in and through Jesus Crucified.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**

If you had lived in the first century and had heard about God becoming flesh and dying upon a Cross for a sin offering, how would you have reacted? In the twenty-first century, how do you react to the death of Jesus upon the Cross? Have you accepted Christ as the One who introduces meaning and order into one's human relationships? Do you think God belongs to the childhood of humanity and that you have outgrown your need of Christ though education? Do you think you have outgrown your need of Christ through your own moral achievements? Men and women cannot determine their own worthiness for the kingdom of God through their own moral achievements. Without Christ, one observes the world seeking something that is loftier, at least to them, than the message about God's Way of salvation. Yet, Christians need to stand firm and proclaim Jesus as the only way of salvation (**Acts 4:12**). In the words of J. H. Oldham, "The Cross cannot be taken out of Christianity without changing it beyond recognition."[1]

It is only in Jesus that the guilt of sin, which separates man from God, can be removed. This truth that Jesus is the only way to God is a truth that is always single and exclusive. In this spiritual truth (**4:6**, "I am the way"), Christians cannot be tolerant. This one truth excludes the possibility of recognizing any other substitute, or way, to God. It is in Jesus that God has found, as it were, a firm footing with humanity (**Romans 3:21-26**). The presence of God in one's life begins in Christ Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:19**, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ"). Without Jesus there is no hope. God sent and gave Jesus for the salvation of men and women. As one reflects upon the Incarnation, one comes away with the understanding that the Incarnation is the divine and merciful answer to humanity's falling away from God. One can expect deliverance only through the act of God in sending His Son for the sins of the world (**John 3:16**, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son").

It is only through faith in Him that one can expect deliverance from condemnation (**3:36**, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life"). Faith is God's gift to humanity.

Faith in His Son is the only means of redemption. God in His wisdom chose faith as the instrument, or channel, through which He would impute (credit) His righteousness to the one who puts his or her faith in Jesus for salvation (**Romans 1:16-17**, "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last"). Faith in Jesus means allowing oneself to be humbled, and, at the same time, faith is the boldness in which one accepts the unspeakable mercy of God in and through His Son Jesus. For one to live in faith is to live in a spirit of thankfulness for the Cross of Calvary. The Christian life is a life of thankfulness for God's mercy in and through His Son Jesus. The message of the Gospel should melt the hearts of men and women. What does the Cross mean to you? Do you sing to God in your heart about redemption?

As you reflect upon salvation, do you think that God's way of salvation is foolishness? Is God's way of salvation a scandal to you? Do you understand the wisdom and love of God in providing a way of rescue from His righteous wrath through faith, not works? According to Paul, the message of the Cross is the mystery of the Gospel that had been hidden from ages past (**Ephesians 1:3-14**) but is now revealed. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, addresses the so-called folly (μωριψα mwria) and scandal (σκαψνδαλον skandalon) of the Cross (σταυροψ stauros) in the lives of Gentiles and Jews. For both the cultivated Gentile and the virtuous Jew, the story of Jesus dying upon the Cross was sheer folly and a shameful scandal.

In today's society, many feel that they no longer need religion, as they call it. The church cannot and must not relax its task of reaching out to the world at large. W. A. Visser't Hooft correctly states: "The task of the Church is to carry forward the work of the Redeemer."[2] People are living in a modern society of scientific technology. Yet, one witnesses suicide among young people under the age of twenty-five as the third leading cause of death.[3] People have a need to belong, at least to something that gives identity. In the USA, youth gangs have increased by 286 to 4,800 during the years 1980—1996.[4] This report states: "Now, as then, gangs provide identity and social relationships for some young people who feel marginalized by the dominant social, economic, and cultural environments in which they live."[5] This report also calls attention to certain behavior before it is classified as a gang: "A group must be involved in a pattern of criminal acts to be considered a youth gang."[6]

With scientific knowledge and the so-called higher education of no absolutes—truth is relative—one quickly realizes that humanity has not arrived at the glorious age of utopia. Knowledge and the wisdom of the world have not overcome the great enemies of human life. The world is not becoming better and better with the passing of time. War and hate still plague this world. World War I (1914-19018) and World War II (1939-1945) reveal the wisdom of the world, a world without God. During WW I, there were over 8,528,831 who were killed or died as a result of this atrocity.[7] These statistics do not suggest that one should do away with science, but rather to remind individuals that the modern world does not touch the problem of humanity—sin. The only thing that will correct the problems of the world is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the crucified One.

The Cross of Christ is a condemnation of the values of the world. It is through the Cross of Christ that God reveals His wrath against sin, and, at the same time, it reveals His purpose to save the world. God has chosen the Church as the vehicle to communicate to

the world this message of salvation through Jesus. Many today are conscious that something besides knowledge is needful if one wishes to introduce meaning into human relationships. One who has been given grace as a sinful human being will desire to share this grace with others. The one who has received this grace undeservedly cannot be intolerant or arrogant toward others. Jesus and Him crucified is the answer to humanity's dilemma. In the words of Emil Brunner:

In fact, we may say, love as grounded in Jesus Christ is the only sure antidote against arrogance and intolerance, because this love springs from the humiliation of man, who acknowledges that truth is not in him, but comes to him, has come to him, and must come to him always, if he is to stay in it. And that truth can never be his own property but is always a present of divine mercy.[8]

Humanity is stuck fast in the mire of heavy mud, a mud that will not turn loose. One cannot lift himself or herself out this mud of hopelessness. J. H. Oldham is correct when he writes: "Every effort to save ourselves is a fresh assertion of our own individual will. And it is our individualism, our self-centeredness and self-sufficiency that separate us from love."[9] God comes to the world in Jesus Christ. Only God can bring about rescue from the dilemma that men and women find themselves in. Numerous individuals within the Christian community seek to earn their salvation through perfect knowledge and obedience to certain rituals performed in a so-called worship service. The message of the cross is not central in their theology.

Many Christians have not understood this revolutionary doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus. For countless Christians, Christianity is a legalistic code, not the gift of God. Christianity has been watered down by rationalism and legalism. Unity within the fellowship of the redeemed can only find expression in the common faith, namely, Jesus (**John 17:20-26**). One can never obtain unity within the fellowship of the redeemed when the Gospel is transformed into a new law. This new law equals tradition and this tradition is accepted on a footing of equality with Scripture. The Church is an inward fellowship of faith and love based upon the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, not perfection in understanding of God's Word (**Galatians 3:6-9**).

As one reflects upon **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, one discovers that the revelation of Jesus Christ is the unique event in history—God became flesh in order to save mankind (**John 1:1-18**). Lots of Christians still trust in their own performance in the hope of becoming pious and well pleasing to God (see also **Romans 10:1-3**). They do not rely upon the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. God comes to His creation in Jesus Christ, the savior of sinners. For the Christian, the Incarnation, the death of Christ, and the resurrection constitutes the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. What is your theology of the Cross? As one seeks new life, one cannot begin anywhere else except in the deed of Christ upon the Cross. As one approaches this text of Paul in his Corinthian correspondence, one cannot help but reflect upon the final revelation of God in Jesus—the story of God's act of mercy. Since one cannot save himself or herself, one must turn to the Old Testament to piece together God's scheme of redemption revealed earlier through His Law, His prophets, and His writings. It is in this vein that Brunner writes:

> That is the meaning of the story which begins with Abraham and Moses and proceeds to the prophets, including that greatest of the prophets, who tells us of

the servant of God who suffers for our sakes and burdens himself with our guilt. [10]

From just a casual reading of the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles, one is immediately conscious that to both the cultural Greek and the pious Jew that the message of the cross was sheer folly as well as a scandal. Paul, in his pericope about Christ, the Wisdom and the Power of God, writes: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). With all the wisdom of the ancient world, the Gentiles were still groaning under the burden of sin and longing for some hitherto unknown remedy that would be adequate to the wants of their entire nature. On the other hand, the Jews, even with their Law, also were longing for something that would ease their conscious. Neither Gentile nor Jew could eliminate the burden of sin. Before God could send His Son, God had to prepare mankind for the reception of Christianity. He did this by making both Gentile and Jew conscious of their own helplessness—one without the Law and one with the Law.

Paul expresses God coming in the flesh this way: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4-5**). What was the message that Paul and others declared throughout the Empire? Luke, a companion of Paul, gives a number of Sermons in the **Book of Acts** from which one can discover the focus of their message. The following four sermons found in the **Book of Acts** illustrates the central theme preached wherever they went: (1) **Acts 2:14-39**, (2) **3:12-26**; (3) **4:8-12**; and (4) **10:36-48**. Peter began his Pentecostal sermon with the pronouncement that the promise of the coming of the Messiah had arrived (**2:14-16**). This sermon summarizes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (**2:22-35**). One also observes that this sermon announces that the events that had just transpired were the fulfillment of prophecy (**2:14-22; 2:29-35**) And finally, one observes the invitation for men and women to repent and to be baptized and to receive the Holy Spirit (**2:38**).

In this first sermon by Peter, one observes the centrality of the crucifixion. The Cross of Jesus stands out in a very vivid manner: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men,[b] put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (**2:23**). Again, Peter proclaims: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (**2:36**). In Peter's second sermon, as recorded by Luke, to some onlookers, after talking about the death of Jesus, proclaims: "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ[a] would suffer" (**3:17**).

Following this event before the onlookers, one finds Peter and John defending their faith in Christ before the Sanhedrin (**4:1-26**). During the course of the message about Christ, Peter tells the Sanhedrin: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (**4:12**). Then in Peter's sermon before Cornelius and his household, Peter declares: "All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (**10:43**). Just a casual reading of the other sermons in the **Book of A**cts reveals the

same focus—Jesus and Him crucified for the sins of the world.

In spite of the fact that Isaiah had prophesied concerning a suffering Messiah (**Isaiah 53**), the Jews could not harmonize the words of Moses in the **Book of Deuteronomy**: "Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse" (**21:23**). The Cross to the Jew was an insuperable barrier to the acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah. The apostles sought to overcome this obstacle by citing the prophets to prove that they had foretold these events, even the resurrection of Jesus. The apostles demonstrated from the Old Testament that this Servant of God paid the debt for the sins of both men and women. He did this in order that He might overcome the distance between God and sinful humanity. He suffered a criminal's death in their place. He removed all barriers for one to approach God. Yes, Jesus cleared the way for everyone to approach God, something that no man or woman could do. Jesus suffered the accursed death that everyone should have suffered. Jesus tells Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**).

These remarks of Jesus to Nicodemus go right to the heart of redemption. God sent His Son in order that everyone who trusts in Jesus could stand before Him. Salvation is about what God has done, not what man has done. It is all God's doing; it is His work of grace. Sins are remitted by His pure gift of grace. All this praise for salvation falls on God alone—nothing on behalf of the work of men and women. Paul writes: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**). These two verses capture the very essence of the folly and scandal of the cross. The message of the Cross leaves everything to the operation of God for salvation; it is God's gift of grace. Paul writes about this message as being "the power of God": "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (**1:18**).

The Greeks seek after wisdom, but the Jews desire their good works to merit their favor with God. It is in this vein concerning the Jews' desire to earn their salvation that Paul penned the following words:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness (**Romans 10:1-3**).

This salvation by grace through faith was too easy for the Jews. If salvation is really the operation of God, what is there for one to do? Will this attitude not open the floodgates for a life of wickedness? Is there no room for one's own sense of responsibility? Will not such a message of justification by faith make life trivial and worthless? Is there a case for one's own exertion of good works in his or her own life as a believer? For the Jews, this message of salvation through the finished work of Christ on the Cross was a stumbling block. The message of the Cross is about God's wisdom versus man's wisdom. God's wisdom consists in His making salvation available by faith alone in His Son Jesus. Paul calls attention to the distinction:

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him,
> God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those
> who believe. [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for
> wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and
> foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and
> Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness
> of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than
> man's strength (**1 Corinthians 1:21-25**).

Since all individuals have sinned, there is no way that one can bring about his or her own salvation. Paul paints a portrait of the Gentiles' dilemma in **Romans** (**1:18—2:16**) without the written Law of God and the Jews' dilemma (**2:17—3:19**) with the written Law of God—both are still under condemnation. In his summary, he writes:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the
> law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable
> to God. [20] Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing
> the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (**3:19-20**).

For Paul, the Law shuts everyone's mouth. Even though Paul draws a rather dismal picture of fallen humanity's plight, he does not leave men and women without hope. He concisely states in **Romans 3:21-31** what he develops in (**1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**). Paul never tires of writing about the message of the Cross—Christ crucified. Listen to Paul as he seeks to unfold the mystery of God's wisdom to both Jew and Gentile:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to
> which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] This righteousness from God comes
> through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, [23] for all
> have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his
> grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] God presented him
> as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to
> demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins
> committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at
> the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith
> in Jesus. [27] Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that
> of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. [28] For we maintain that a man is
> justified by faith apart from observing the law. [29] Is God the God of Jews only?
> Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, [30] since there is only one
> God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through
> that same faith. [31] Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather,
> we uphold the law (**Romans 3:21-31**).

Within the Christian community today, many Christians still cannot believe that salvation is by faith alone in the finished work of Christ. This rejection of salvation by grace is a revolt of one's natural pride. Paul labored the point of Abraham's justification through faith in the **fourth chapter of Romans**. Pay attention once more to Paul as he

seeks to drive home this point:

> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—
> but not before God. [3] What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God,
> and it was credited to him as righteousness"[a] (**4:2-3**).

How did Abraham receive the righteousness of God? Paul says through faith. The message of the Cross is the Gospel of God. Justification by faith is an act of grace and mercy, not works. The message of the Cross is God's wisdom. This wisdom is demonstrated in making Jesus one's righteousness. How does this happen? Is it by works or by faith? Paul labors this point in the Roman letter. In **Romans 1:16-17**, Paul lays down the theme—justification by faith:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation
> of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the
> gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith
> from first to last,[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."[b]

Those in Christ are in Christ because of God (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). Jesus Christ is God's wisdom. How? God's wisdom is displayed in and through Jesus by His being made our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption (**1:31**). This new life in Christ cannot begin anywhere except in the deed of Christ upon the Cross. In the Cross of Jesus one witnesses the redeeming act of God—His wisdom. Since salvation is by faith in the atoning work of Christ, does this not open the doors to a life of rebellion against holiness in one's daily walk? The answer is no! Paul deals with this philosophy in **Romans 6**. One wonders how anyone could appropriate God's gift of redemption and continue to live a life in defiance of God's grace (**Titus 2:11-14**). The simplicity of this new obedience is that one seeks to do what is good and pleasing to God because of His grace. Every believer seeks to live his or her life in such a way that it becomes an expression of the prayer taught by Jesus to His disciples: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (**Matthew 6:10**).

Whenever one seeks God's guidance, God's grace influences his or her ideas and ways. When one exercises faith in Christ, one is conscious that one's past is buried in Christ under the Cross—one's guilt is there. For every believer, Christ is the object of his or her faith—the crucified One. Since this is so, every Christian's morality is as a result of his or her faith. One cannot have Christian morality without having faith in the crucified One. Are you living in the love of God so that you reflect the rays of His light in your life? The meaning of His death on the Cross is exemplified in one's walk with Him in holiness. God's act in Christ gives one the incentive to let his or her light shine so that the world may glorify God (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Do you worship God in your daily walk? When one fails to have a high regard for God, true faith ceases to exist in his or her life. One might say, according to Brunner, "The end of true reverence is the end of true religion."[11]

CONCLUSION

In **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, Paul discloses the revelation of forgiveness through

Jesus Christ. This enigma about holiness and mercy is what baffles the minds of both men and women. For the world, God's honor and God's wrath have no place within a philosophical concept of God. The God of the philosophers is not the God of the Bible, but of thought. The God of the Bible is described as: God is love. As one reflects upon God's Law, one is conscious that law, in and of itself, is unchangeable, static, timeless, and the eternal will of God. From this point of view of the law, there can be only one possibility—destruction for disobedience. Yet, the Gospel of God, which is disclosed in Jesus, is about God's love. This love takes hold of us in Christ. The sending of Christ was the only way for God to maintain His justice, and, at the same time, justify sinful humanity (**Romans 3:25-26**).

Even today, within many Christian communities, one discovers that scores of believers still cannot accept this radical message of free grace. In **1 Corinthians 1:18—2:8**, Paul sets forth forgiveness and justification of the sinner through the suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53** as the folly and scandal of both Gentile and Jew. The message of the Cross is the unity of God's holiness and God's love manifested in the crucified One. The message of the Cross is that through Jesus, God has broken down the barrier of sin that separated Him from His creatures. It is in Jesus that God his linked humanity to Himself in peace and reconciliation through belief in the One who made atonement for the sins of the World. It is in Christ crucified that God reveals that His love is unconditional (**Romans 5:6**, "When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.") It is in Jesus that the guilt of sin is removed.

As one peruses the world religions, one thing that one will never find in the religions of the world is that God became a man in order to redeem man. One will never find in the religions of the world the teaching that a man came to earth to reconcile fallen humanity to Himself by the sacrifice of His life for those who had become separated from Himself through their guilt and sin. This teaching is what appeared folly to the world at large. Yet, this teaching is what separates Christianity from the religions of the world.

The Gospel of Jesus is just this—sinful men and women who are estranged from God through their sins are restored by the fact that Jesus, the Son of God, gave His life a ransom for many: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," said Jesus (**Matthew 20:28**). The Gospel of Jesus is about the guilt of sin being removed in and through Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus reveals that men and women do not find a way to God, but rather God comes to all through faith in His Son. God's purpose is to save the world in and through Jesus. As one reflects upon the message of the Cross, one discovers that the Cross of Jesus is a condemnation of the values of the world. The following words of Paul in this study (**1 Corinthians 2:1-8**) sums up Paul's desire to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified:

> When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[c] 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age,

who are coming to nothing. [7] No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. [8] None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

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[1] Dr. W. A. Visser't Hooft and Dr. J. H. Oldham, *The Church and Its function in Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1938), 142.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, "Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet" [on-line]; available from http://cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm; Internet; accessed 20 October 2003.

[4] Youth Violence Prevention, "Gangs" [on-line]; available from http://www.safeyouth.org/topics/gangs.htm.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] "Table 4: Armed Forces Mobilized and Casualties in World War 1" [CD-Rom]. Deluxe Edition 2002. Prepared by John Graham and Royde-Smith, editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* copyright 1994-2002.

[8] Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1951). 28.

[9] J. M. Oldham, *Life is Commitment* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 76, 77.

[10] Emil Brunner, "The Folly and Scandal of the Cross," in *The Great Invitation and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 58.

b Or *of those not having the law* (that is, Gentiles). Footnotes with the letters of the alphabet are associated with the Scripture citations as given in the NIV.

a Or *Messiah*; also in verse 20

f Or *his only begotten Son*

b Jer. 9:24

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

a Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22

a Or *is from faith to faith*

b Hab. 2:4

[11] Emil Brunner, *The Scandal of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 27.

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God~s mystery*

The One Mediator: Jesus Christ

Thrust Statement: **The Cross of Jesus is the Divine act of reconciliation for sinful men and women.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Timothy 2: 5-6**

One cannot reflect upon Christ as the One mediator (μεσιψτϊ mesiths) between God and humanity without a consciousness that the Cross of Jesus is the sign of the Christian faith and of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The words "He was pierced for our transgressions" (**Isaiah 53:5**) are the whole foundation upon which Christianity stands. It is this truth that makes Christianity distinctive from all other religions in the world. The message of the Cross is the central mystery of the Gospel of God (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). Paul, in writing to Timothy, says: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time" (**1 Timothy 2:5-6**).[1]

Paul, in his Epistles to the Ephesians, sought to explain this mystery of God—the One mediator between God and men—so that men and women might find hope. For the believer, the Cross is the divine act of reconciliation for sinful men and women. At the Cross of Jesus, one observes that the intellectual and moral pride of one trying to earn his or her salvation is finally broken in Him. Unless one understands the significance of the Cross of Jesus, one will never have the security of eternal life. The Cross of Jesus is a constant reminder of salvation by grace through faith. Paul tackles this priceless and glorious truth in his Ephesian Epistle as he seeks to unfold this mystery of God that had been hidden from ages past:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (**Ephesians 2:14-16**).

Jesus, the Mediator, is "our peace." It is through Jesus that God reconciles both Jew and Gentile unto Himself through the Cross. In the Cross of Jesus, one observes an actual objective transaction in the redemption of humanity. God does something that is absolutely essential for the salvation of both men and women. The starting point of Christianity is that God meets us in and through Jesus. Paul brings this truth home when he writes his second Epistle to the Corinthians: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). God reveals Himself in Christ, the Mediator between God and humanity. Timothy and Barbara Friberg and Neva Miller define, according to the Greek text, the word *mediator* as follows:

> Μεσιψτϊ (Mesiths), ου (ou), οΣ (&o) basically, a neutral and trusted person in the middle (μεΨσö mesos); (1) one who works to remove disagreement *mediator, go-between, reconciler* (1T 2.5); (2) one who provides a guarantee of fulfillment of contracted obligation *mediator* (HE 9.15).[2]

The words *mediator* or *arbitrator* speak of one who mediates between two parties to remove a disagreement or to reach a common goal. The world religions do not accept Jesus as the Mediator between God and humanity. In a perusal of the world religions, one discovers that even though some accept belief in God, yet, at the same time, they deny the death of Jesus upon the Cross as a reconciling sacrifice. The message of Jesus Christ is incomprehensible to the world at large. Jesus came to deal with sin that affects man as well as God. When one violates God's Law, God's glory is at stake. Sin is an infringement of His glory. God's holiness is at stake. Thus, God's Divine punishment also proceeds from His holiness. One cannot rebel against God's Law with impunity.

God's holiness demands His wrath against sin. The Divine wrath of God must punish the sinner. Since everyone is guilty before God, this means that everyone falls under Divine condemnation. It is impossible for individuals to escape the consequences of his or her own actions on his or her own terms. One cannot pardon himself or herself. One's guilt is an inescapable necessity of punishment. God must maintain His holiness. The only way God could be just and, at the same time, the justifier of sinful humanity was/is through the atonement of Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for the violation of God's holiness. The biblical doctrine of the atonement (Christ dying upon the Cross) cannot be understood apart from the idea of God's holiness, His Divine wrath, and His Divine righteousness in punishment.

Whenever one confronts the Mediator (Jesus Christ) at the Cross, one perceives the Divine will to forgive, His holiness, and His wrath. The Cross of Jesus paints a picture of God's character—His wrath, His punishment, His love, and His forgiveness. The Cross of Christ is the place where one meets the loving, merciful, and forgiving God. It is in and through the Cross that one perceives God in all His holiness. A debt must be paid that lies outside all human possibilities. The death of Jesus is the cost and the price for humanity's sinfulness. In the death of Jesus one is confronted with the revelation of God's grace, the reality of His wrath, and the necessity of punishment for an affront against His holiness. In the Cross one is confronted with a paradox—God's wrath and His Divine love that blots out the sins of those who put their faith and trust in the One Mediator, Jesus Christ, between God and man. This action of wrath and of love on the part of God is as big a mystery as is the mystery of the Triune God.

It is only in the Cross that the absolute holiness of God and His absolute mercy meet. Both God's holiness and God's mercy meet at the foot of the Cross. It is in the Cross that Law and love are brought together. Is it any wonder that Paul could write: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.[c] 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**). It is in and through the Mediator that God descends and runs, as it were, after sinful humanity. As one approaches God through the Mediator, one is stripped completely naked of any goodness or works upon which one can stand before God justified; it is all of God.

Forgiveness cannot be subjective, that is to say, forgiveness is not just a matter of speaking; for example, God said, '"Let there be light,' and there was light" (**Genesis 1:3**). Forgiveness is not that easy, since sin is an affront to God's holiness. In Christianity, forgiveness is concretized in an historical event—the incarnation. It is in this vein that John writes: " The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:14**). There is a necessity of an objective atonement, not a subjective atonement. Paul develops this concept in his Roman Epistle. As he seeks to unfold salvation by grace through faith, he defends the necessity of an objective atonement in and through the incarnation of Christ:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:21-26**).

It is only in Christ that one is able to perceive the burden of guilt. God has revealed the forgiveness of sin in and through Jesus. John the Baptist expresses this truth with the following words: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (**John 1:29**)! It is through the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross that sin is taken away (**Isaiah 53**). Guilt is too great to be removed through simple forgiveness—"I forgive you." Before forgiveness can take place with God, something else must happen before forgiveness can become possible. The biblical doctrine of forgiveness is based upon the Atonement of Christ. Forgiveness of sins cannot be received through knowledge, exercise of the will, or through ritual acts, but only through the Jesus Christ. The Cross of Jesus is the sign of this revelation of forgiveness. Mark, in his Gospel, records the following words of Jesus to His disciples: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**Mark 10:45**).

The reconciling revelation of God is the Mediator. This unique event—Incarnation—in history is none other than the eternal God who is beyond and above time. God takes the initiative (**John 3:16**); Christ humbles Himself (**Philippians 2:5-11**). One

cannot look upon the Cross without a consciousness that God really comes to sinful humanity. The very essence of the Christian faith is to believe that in no one else is salvation (**Acts 4:12**); salvation can only be found in the One who is Mediator between God and humanity. This coming of Jesus breaks down the barriers that are opposed to forgiveness. It is only in Him that one can truly understand the Father as the God of love. It is only in and through Jesus that one can come to understand the phrase "guilt of sin" and the phrase "the forgiving love of God."

As one glances over time with the eye of faith and looks upon the Cross, one is immediately conscious that the Cross signifies substitutionary atonement. It is only through the Mediator that there is communing with the Divine life (**John 14:6**). It is through the miracle of divine revelation that God reveals His desire to have communion with both men and women. God wants communion with Dallas Burdette; God wants communion with Raymond Miller; God wants communion with Tim Bowen; God wants communion with Alton Bailey; in fact, God wants communion with every individual. Even before this universe was spoken into existence, God, according to Paul, "Chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (**Ephesian 1:4**). How does one become a part of God's elect? Again, Paul zeros in on the essential fact that brings about this status: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**1:13**).

Without belief in the Mediator,[3] one cannot have communion with God. God wants to have communion with me; God wants to have communion with you. The Mediator's approach to humanity is not simply human solidarity, but rather the blending of the Divine and human in His Incarnation. His coming is the most unique event in the annals of the world. One observes in the blending of the Divine and the human elements in redemption the means whereby God justifies sinful humanity. The death of Jesus is an integral part of His vocation (**Mark 10:45; 8:31**). In the death of Jesus, one does not simply view death in the universal human sense but in the theocratic sense. In other words, it is the suffering of the Messiah, that is to say, the suffering of the Person—the God/Man—who can be none other than Himself—God become flesh (**John 1:1-14**). The vicarious offering (substitution for another) is something entirely personal. It is personal in the sense that this atonement sets forth the personality of the Mediator—One who acts vicariously[4] for both man and God.

What does it mean to say that the Mediator acts vicariously for both man and God? God's nature is revealed in His Son (**John 14:6-9**). It is in Jesus that the love of God breaks through His wrath. It is only in Christ that God can extend His love without endangering His holiness (**Romans 3:21-26**). In Jesus one witnesses the revealed love of God. It is only in Christ that one experiences the forgiveness of sins (**Colossians 1:14**). One who does not believe in Jesus is under God's wrath (**John 3:18**). The very essence of the Christian faith is to believe that salvation is found in no one else (**Acts 4:12**). It is also essential to believe that this suffering of the Messiah upon the Cross as an atonement happened only once (**Hebrews 9:26**). God takes the initiative in the salvation of humanity (**John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:17-19**). It is in the Cross that God comes to humanity. There is a sense in which one might say that the Cross is the total expression of His life.

Jesus is the only One who can reconcile humanity to God. How? In the

Incarnation, Jesus identifies Himself wholly with man, but, at the same time, He is absolutely united to God (**John 1:1-3**). He is the only One to whom this task of redemption could be assigned. Why? The answer is found in the fact that Jesus is God, the Unique Savior. Since Jesus is one with God, this constitutes the basis of His solidarity with man (**Hebrew 2:14-18; 1 John 4:9-10; 1 Timothy 3:16**). Without the Mediator, one is not stripped entirely naked. One does not sense the guilt of sin. Christianity is unlike the religions of the world. In Christianity, God descends and runs after humanity. One can never deal with guilt apart from the intervention of God—sending His Son for the sins of the world.

Since sin is an injury done to God Himself, God provides the expiatory sacrifice, not man. If one rejects the idea of God's wrath, one must of necessity reject His love. The world, as a whole, recognizes the need for expiatory sacrifice. Until one recognizes that he or she stands naked before God, one will not seek God's forgiveness through His Mediator. Since humanity rebelled against God, God offered a divine sacrifice that is offered only once—His Son (**Hebrew 9:26**). One cannot live without God, but one cannot live with God so long as one's guilt is not atoned for, that is to say, expiated through the Cross of Christ (**Romans 3:9-23**). One cannot stand in the presence of God's holiness without a change of garments—the righteousness of God. God's wisdom consists in the means whereby He could accomplish the impossible, so it seemed to mortal man and the angels. Paul describes God's wisdom of redemption this way:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord"[b] (**1 Corinthians 1:30-31**).

God alone can make this sacrifice. It is God who does it. It is God who suffers. It is God who takes the burden upon Himself. Sin is no illusion. Wrath is no illusion. In the New Testament, one discovers that the Cross of Christ is the self-offering of God. God alone is the One who can "cover" sin as though it had never been. It is God who takes everything upon Himself. Since God is holy, something must take place in order that the past may be completely obliterated. This disharmony cannot simply be removed by God's love, because the love of God is holy. God is not only the Merciful One, but He is also the Holy One. In the sacrifice of Jesus, one sees the mercy and holiness of God expressed in all its fullness. In the crucifixion of Jesus, one witnesses an historical event—a real concrete historical event. Whoever rejects the Atonement of Christ remains severed from the God of love. In the Gospel of God, one observes the gulf between humanity and God removed. In the Gospel, one observes a real movement—an event that shows the seriousness of humanity's condition and the unspeakable wonder of God's love.

CONCLUSION

This self-movement of God began before the creation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). This is the theme of the Old Testament from beginning to end (**Luke 24:44- 49**). The Mediator that Paul speaks of in his **First Epistle to Timothy** (**2:5-6**) is the One that the Prophets foretold. Jesus came in order to deliver those who put their faith in Him. Without Jesus, one is still under God's wrath. This disposition of God's wrath was/is caused by the rupture of communion with Him through sin. God takes sin seriously. "God cannot be mocked," writes the apostle Paul (**Galatians 6:7**). As a result of humanity's attitude

toward sin, this action produced a change in God's attitude toward sinful humanity. If God had not taken action against rebellion, this unconcern would indicate that God does not love. In other words, God's unconcern would mean that God is mocked. If God had not taken His own command and will seriously, this would indicate that God is not unyielding, unbendable, and not reliable. The wrath of God is God taking Himself seriously and humanity seriously. The wrath of God is a necessary expression of God's reaction to revolt.

The one who refuses to entertain God's wrath, God's judgment, and God's condemnation will never take Jesus the Mediator seriously. Out of God's holiness springs His wrath. Out of God's holiness comes the necessity of judgment and punishment for one who turns his back upon Him. It is only in and through Jesus that the breach can be restored between God and humanity. Jesus views His whole life as a divine act of forgiveness: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (**Luke 19:10**). The last phase of the Incarnation is found in the Cross of Christ and the message of atonement in and through Jesus. The Cross demonstrates to sinners the holiness of God together with His mercy. Guilt is a reality even for God. God reacted to this guilt by sending Jesus as the Mediator, the Savior of the world. In the Philippian letter, Paul reveals God's coming down to man in the Incarnation. One can say that God's wrath is an effect of His holiness. It is God's love that leads to the Cross of the Savior.

If one wishes eternal life, one must overcome self-righteousness. This kind of mentality can only be overcome through the message of reconciling death of Jesus upon Calvary. The doctrine of the Cross and justification by faith is the very heart of the message of salvation. One can only live by God's grace, not one's own works of righteousness. Do you want forgiveness? Do you want a relationship with God? Do you want eternal life? If so, this can only be found in Jesus, God's Mediator between God and men. It is in Jesus that one observes the coming of the kingdom of God and of a new covenant, a covenant in which God will not remember sins any longer (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**). As you reflect upon the Cross, do you stand in awe of God's matchless love, His unfathomable mercy, and His perfect holiness? Are you willing to accept Jesus as God's Mediator? Jeremiah tells the "fact" of forgiveness, but Paul tells the "how" of forgiveness (**Romans 3:21-26**).

In conclusion, the following Scripture citations are given to call attention to the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ in His bridging the gap between God and humanity:

> For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. [7] And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (**1 Timothy 2:5-7**).
>
> But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises (**Hebrews 8:6**).
>
> For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (**Hebrews 9:15**).

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (**Hebrews 12:22-24**).
Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (**Romans 10:1-4**).

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[1]All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), unless stated otherwise.

[2]Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. Vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 259.

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God~s mystery*

d Or *the Only Begotten*

a 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

[3] One who mediates, especially one who serves as an intermediary to reconcile differences.

[4] Acting in place of someone or something else.

b Jer. 9:24

We Must Glory in the Cross

Thrust Statement: **God's people should determine not to know anything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**

Scripture Reading: **1 Corinthians 2:1-2; Galatians 6:11-18**

> See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand! Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen (**Galatians 6:11-18**).[1]

Do you glory in the cross of Christ? Or do you glory in your own works? Did you receive salvation through the cross of Christ or through your own efforts? Did you receive the Spirit of God through your obedience to God's law, or did you receive the Spirit through faith? Are you a child of God through faith, or are you a child of God through law keeping? Are you glorying in the cross of Christ, or are you glorying in your own efforts? Is salvation from God? Or is salvation from you?

If you are glorying in your own efforts, you are denying justification by faith. In other words, you are in reality denying the purpose of the cross of Christ. Paul captures graphically the nature of salvation when he says,

Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (**Romans 3:24-26**).

The cross was an outstanding victory over Satan, death, and condemnation. As the people of God, every believer should live his/her daily life with a sensitive awareness of Christ's cross. Paul points out the significance of the cross and the blood to the Colossians: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (**Colossians 1:19-20**). Is it any wonder that Paul shudders, as it were, at glorying at anything other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (**Galatians 6:14**).

WE MUST GLORY IN THE PERSON OF THE CROSS

The author of Hebrews encourages the disciples of Jesus to fix their eyes on Him who is "the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (**Hebrews 12:2-3**). "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). For just a moment, let us ease drop on a scene that took place in heaven with the twenty-four elders who fell down before the Lamb of God in praise:

> And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (**Revelation 5:9-10**).

Not only did the twenty-four elders fall down and worship, but John tells his listeners about thousands of angels who joined in praise to the Lamb of God:

> Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped (**Revelation 5:11-14**).

There is a sense in which one can never know His Lord Jesus Christ without the cross. The penal aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus is the essence of the gospel. Peter says, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (**1 Peter 2:24**). This gospel is so important that Paul reminds the Corinthians not to forget the gospel he proclaimed

to them:

> Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (**1 Corinthians 15:1-4**).

Paul wanted them to know that Jesus had to die, "for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (**Hebrews 9:22**).

Christ's death upon the cross was not an afterthought on the part of God. Peter on the day of Pentecost acknowledged the foreordination of this redeeming event: "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross" (**Acts 2:23**). On the day of the resurrection, the women who had previously followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (**Luke 23:55**) visited the tomb of Jesus only to be questioned by "two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning" (**24:4**). These two men said: "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Then they remembered his words" (**24:5-8**).

Following a squabble between the apostles over the request of James and John for positions of honor (**Mark 10:35-41**), Jesus reminds them all: "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (**10:45**). There was sovereignty about His death, for He chose the manner of His death and unfolded it to His disciples. He knew He was going to die. Matthew records three separate occasions **(Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19**) in which Jesus foretold about death and resurrection on the third day. In His last Passover meal with the disciples, He explains to His disciples that the third cup (The Cup of Blessing) represented His shed blood: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**).

Isaiah (739 BCE), over seven hundred years before, had prophesied concerning the crucifixion of Jesus for the sins of many:

> He was despised, and we esteemed him not. [4] Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. [6] We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. [7] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was

led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. [8] By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. [9] He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. [10] Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. [11] After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (**Isaiah 53:4-12**).

This is substitutionary atonement: "the LORD makes his life a guilt offering" (**Isaiah 53:10**). No wonder Paul shouts: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). Do you not understand why Paul dared not boast about his salvation except in the cross of Christ? It is as Paul says, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). Again, Paul writes, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (**3:25**). Jesus died to become your Savior. I remind each of you that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men**" (1 Timothy 2:5-6**).

Once more, Paul's words are to the point: "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (**Romans 3:24**). Can you boast about your works? Do you think that your works have put you in a right relationship with God? Listen again as Paul nails the coffin shut about "works righteousness": "Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle is boasting excluded? Is boasting excluded on the principle of observing the law? No, boasting is excluded on the principle of faith. Paul emphatically states: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (**3:27-28**).

CONCLUSION

You would never know salvation from the penalty of sin were it not for the fact that Jesus died at Calvary. Have you knelt at Calvary and said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Galatians 6:14**). Where do you stand? Remember that the glory of the cross is the glory of His person, His purpose, and His power. Will you look at that cross and beyond it to Christ and give your answer?

WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

Written: 1707

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God; all the vain things that charm me most—I sacrifice them to His blood. See, from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down; did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown? Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small: Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Oakwood Hills Church

DeFuniak Springs, FL

Date: June 20, 1999

Time: 11 am

Occasion: Gospel Meeting

Oakwood Hills Church

DeFuniak Springs, FL

Date: November 19, 2000

Time: 11 am

Present: 64

[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

Devotional Studies No. 16

Christians Silent About The Good News of God

If the people of God are to reach out to the lost, every individual must be fully committed to the cause of Christ. The author of Chronicles records the remarks of Hanani the seer to Asa king of Judah: "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (**2 Chronicles 16:9**). Just a brief reflection upon the words of the Holy Spirit to Asa reminds one of the words of Jesus: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (**Matthew 6:24**). Again, Jesus says, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (**6:33**). This kind of spirit permeated the Macedonian churches. The Macedonian Christians gave money to help the destitute saints in Jerusalem. Paul, in commenting on their generosity, wrote: "And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (**2 Corinthians 8:5**).

Is your local congregation reaching out? Yes! Hopefully, every local body of believers will reach out more and more in its desire to promote the kingdom of God. One might almost say that the present-day church is better equipped for every other task than it is for its primary mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. When the church is silent, it is not true to its calling. Do not Christians incur guilt when they do not pass on the Gospel they have been entrusted with? The church of Jesus cannot be a true church when it is silent about the good news of God's way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Today, there is a great deal of shyness in speaking about the things of God to a lost and dying world. God's people must work toward breaking down the traditional aloofness that produces a church of silent saints.

Are you praying for the advancement of God's kingdom? Are you one of the ones seeking to work the harvest? Are you praying that God will send forth laborers into His vineyard? Matthew mentions an occasion in which Jesus was reaching out to men and women who were harassed and helpless. As he looked upon these individuals, Matthew informs us that His heart was filled with compassion. Listen to Matthew as he captures the tender compassion of Jesus:

> [35] Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. [36] When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because

they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. [38] Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (**Matthew 9:35-38**).

Are you one of the workers for Jesus? Have you asked the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest field? Having said this, one must not depreciate the importance of the congregation. The congregation of God should be so structured that it encourages mobilization of the people to be a gathered people, a group called out from the world to strengthen, encourage, and comfort one another. But, on the other hand, the congregation should also be taught to scatter and go out into the world to confess Christ. There is a divine rhythm—come and scatter.

Devotional Studies No. 17

Commemorative Institutions

Christians observe three commemorative institutions—Sunday, Lord's Supper, and baptism—which institutions are associated with the acts of God in historical events. These commemorative institutions are not arbitrary symbols. They represent actual events in history. In the observance of these three institutions, the Christian community testifies to Christianity as a historical religion. Christianity is tied to history. These three institutions are symbolical in nature and attest to the divine origin of Christianity. Commemorative institutions are not new to the Christian era. Just a perusal of the Old Testament reveals that God ordained various rituals as commemorative institutions in order to testify to historical events within the nation of Israel. Rituals confirm the validity of the divine nature of the Jewish religion. In the same way, the three commemorative institutions prove the authenticity of Christianity. God ordained certain rituals as reminders of historical events as well as of events to come. Some commemorative institutions in the Old Testament were also prophetic in that they foretold of the coming of the Messiah.

Memorial institutions in the Old Testament were of a twofold operation; that is to say, they were designed for ones living at the time of the historical events and for future generations, which rites continued to testify to the historical events. A classic example is the Jewish Passover instituted by God to commemorate Israel's departure from Egypt. God informed Moses that He would strike down the firstborn of all living (**Exodus 12:12**). In order to avoid this plague, God told Moses to inform the families of Israel to kill a lamb and place some of its blood "on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses" (**12:7**). God then told Moses: "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (**12:13**). Moses then addresses the necessity of continuing to observe this Passover as a memorial of this historical event: "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance" (**12:14**). Later, after they entered the land of Canaan, they were told: "And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Pasover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians" (**14:27**).

Another commemorative institution God ordained for the Israelites concerned their living in tents. This commemorative event is found in the Feast of Tabernacles (**Leviticus 23:33-43**). They are told to celebrate this institution "for seven days each year" (**23:41a**) and to keep this feast as "a lasting ordinance for the generations to come" (**23:41b**). God did not want them to forget this historical event: "All native-born

Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt (**23:42**). The two commemorative institutions, as well as many others, were designed to preserve and conduct forward the miraculous evidences of their origin and their religion, which produces faith in future generations. Even today, Jews still commemorate these institutions, which observances continue to testify to the historical accuracy of the events.

If the actions had not happened, it is difficult to believe that the commemorative institutions could have been inaugurated. For instance, one should reflect upon a modern day commemorative institution to give validity to the above information, the Fourth of July celebration; this commemorative institution celebrates an historical event—declaration of independence (1776). If the event had not occurred, would this day still be celebrated as a national holiday? Could the Jews have been persuaded to adhere to the various commemorative institutions if the reasons assigned to them had never occurred, especially founded upon demonstrated facts?

God also ordained memorials associated with the Christian Church in order to perpetuate the historical accuracy of the events attested. Within Christianity, Christians still celebrate Sunday—a day commemorative of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead. This day calls attention to the historical circumstances surrounding the Death of Christ. If this day had not occurred, one wonders how so many Jews were persuaded to accept this day over and above the Sabbath day. Sunday is a perpetual commemorative institution of the birth of immortal hope—a dawn of life beyond this life. This day attest to historic fact of His Death and Resurrection. Many witnesses witnessed his Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Observance of Sunday as a day of remembrance of the Christ has continued down to the present day, which day Christians continue to celebrate. Immediately following the Death and Resurrection of Christ, the commemorative day is instituted (within fifty days). Just a perusal of the New Testament writings indicates that God ordained two commemorative institutions to commemorate the historical events surrounding the sufferings of Christ upon Calvary: Lord's Supper and baptism.

Christianity is a story that runs from eternity to eternity. Peter speaks of Jesus as "chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake" **(1 Peter 1:20).** Jesus told some Jews: "before Abraham was born, I am" (**John 8:58**). At a particular point in time, God became flesh—He entered time (**1:14**). John later wrote: "That which was from the

beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and out hands have touched" **(1 John 1:1).** Peter, too, testifies: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" **(2 Peter. 1:16).**

The Christian community of Jesus also gives credence to Christianity as a historical religion. The Church stands as a commemorative institution to the Christ of history. The Lord's Supper, Christian baptism, and the Church exist as memorials of historical events that occurred in the historical past. What does "commemorative institutions" mean to you? The first day of the week has been continuous from the day of the Resurrection down to the present day. Many witnessed the Resurrection and the commemorative institution following the Resurrection known as Sunday, which takes place immediately and has been perpetuated down to the current day (2007). As stated above, there are three commemorative actions that give testimony to the validity of Christianity, namely, the Church, the Lord's Supper, and Christian baptism. The Lord's Supper occurred before the event actually occurred—His Death upon the Cross. It commemorates an event prior to its occurrence. On the other hand, baptism commemorates an event after its occurrence.

The Lord's Day (Sunday) commemorates the time of the Resurrection; the Lord's Supper commemorates His Death, Burial, Resurrection, and, at the same time, testifies to the coming of Christ in judgment upon the nation of Israel in AD 70; and baptism also commemorates His Death, Burial, and Resurrection. Baptism is also the one act that Christians share in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of the historical Christ. Baptism is a positive act of requirement from God. Baptism keeps the reality of Christ's death standing forever, as

it were, before the eyes of men and women. Whenever one observes baptism, one cannot help but recall Christ crucified, pierced, wounded, dead, buried, resurrected from the dead, and ascended in His glory. These various memorials, or rituals, have helped to preserve the miraculous events found in Christianity down through the centuries. Every element of the various rituals operates as a commemoration of its Divine origin and produces faith in all future generations. The rituals were designed to stand for perpetual monuments to the nations of the miraculous nature of Christianity. Memorials provide living testimony to the credibility of the Christians faith.

Devotional Studies

Commitment to the Lord

Commitment to Jesus as Lord is a matter for the entire person, not just his or her mind alone. It is in this vein that Jesus responded to an "expert in the Law." Matthew says that "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'" (**Matthew 22:37**). It is true that intellectual conviction is essential, but this is not the whole story. Unless the whole person is involved, the intellectual conviction is useless. James, the Lord's earthly brother, wrote about intellectual conviction versus commitment. Listen to James as he drives home this point: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (**James 2:19**).

Are you a part of the elect of God? Predestination is, unfortunately, often misapplied by many sincere believers. Whenever one speaks of the elect of God, one must always bear in mind that the eternal decree of God can only be understood in correlation with faith, not separate from faith in Jesus as Lord. The elect are those who love God. One cannot separate election and faith. How can one know that he or she is a part of God's elect? The answer lies in this: one should cling to His revelation in Jesus Christ and believe in Him. If one does this, one will know that he or she belongs to the elect of God. It goes almost without saying that out of the biblical doctrine of election that one becomes conscious ot the biblical mandate for ethics. It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Ephesians about good works following redemption. Listen to Paul as he writes about grace and good works:

> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (**Ephesians 2:8-10**)

One cannot read this Scripture citation without a realization that God's grace is first; yet, it is not forced on any individual, but submitted to by one's free will. Both men and women are treated as individuals who can and should make a free decision to follow or not to follow Jesus. Grace must be accepted by each individual in order to experience salvation through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Remember, God binds himself to humanity, but this binding still requires the human response of both men and women in binding himself or herself to God. One's response to God's plan of salvation in and through Christ is required in order to become a part of God's elect. God allows each individual the power of free decision. Whenever one walks in sin, one is in opposition to God. Sin is the proof of God's bestowed power upon men and women to decide for themselves as to whether to reject or accept His grace. Are you misusing God's power of

freedom. Sin is one's act against God.

What does the Gospel of God mean to you? Are you conscious that in the Incarnation that God reveals Himself as the God who approaches sinful humanity? In the Incarnation (God becomes flesh), one observes the work of the redeemer. Jesus the Mediator must be understood as an act of God. In other words, it is in Him and only through Him that God does something to humanity. It is in Him that God reveals Himself; It is in Him that God reconciles the world unto Himself. What does God's grace mean to you? Remember, God's grace becomes judgment when one refuses to repent. Repentance means that one accepts the death of Jesus as a divine judgment against sin.

Repentance is an act of faith in Jesus as God's way of salvation. God wants a "yes" to His Gospel, but, at the same time, He wants a "no" to sin. When one repents, there must be a change of dispostion, that is to say, there must be a surrender of oneself to God who draws each individual into the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. When one refuses to repent of his or her former lifestyle of sin, this unreadiness to repent brings God's wrath. Repentance represents, as it were, the death of the person who has deserted God. On the other hand, faith in Jesus brings about life; in Jesus, one becomes a new person. What does faith mean to you? One can say that the hightest expression of faith means to live for the Lord and to be an instrument in His kingdom for the furtherance of His Gospel.

What are the fruits of faith? The fruits of the faith are the manifestations of one's repentance. Through fruits of one's faith, one observes the tokens of one's faith in visible form. As one experiences fellowship with God, one meets His love with responding love—the obedience of faith. Remember, justification is by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone. Christians do good works, not to be saved, but rather to express thankfulness for His grace. The Gospel is about how God broke through His own law and broke the curse of His law with His presence in and through Jesus. When one accepts Jesus, then the human "I" is dethroned. It is no longer "my will," but "His will."

Devotional Studies No. 24

Conduct in the New Age

Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, sets forth the characteristics of one who through faith is righteous. When one is placed in a right relationship with God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, this new relationship demands ethical behavior that brings honor and glory to the Creator of the universe. As a result of justification by faith, Paul begins Chapter Twelve with "I urge" (παρακαλῶ, parakalw, "I appeal") you. Unless one's life and deeds are in harmony, or agreement, with the Gospel, then the Gospel has no significance for this individual. Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of Romans relate to one's Christian performance. Since one is no longer under the "old aeon" (old age), but under the "new aeon" (new age), one's life must be molded and shaped in synchronization, or harmony, with the "new aeon." As one reflects upon Chapter Twelve, one observes two characteristics that are to envelop every believer—a new life in Christ and a new life in love.

Paul begins Chapter Twelve with a call to "spiritual worship." He then proceeds to the development of this new worship by beginning with a "life in love" and then approaches the concluding exhortation with one's new "life in Christ," which life exemplifies itself in right conduct. He speaks about love and how love is the fulfilling of the Law (**Romans 13:8**). In one's relationship to God and to His children, the guiding principle is "to walk according to love" (**14:15**). Everyone should put his or her conduct in conformity with the "new aeon." These chapters give a brief summary of Paul's ethics. One recalls Paul's earlier comments about one's baptism and the implications of this action. He writes: "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with" (**Romans 6:6**). Prior to this statement, he drew this conclusion from one's baptism: "we walk in newness of life" (**6:4**).

The Gospel transforms one's ways and conduct. When one is in Christ, one's actions are to be different from what it was formerly. Every person should examine himself or herself with the following questions: Is my way of life in Christ different from my past way of life in the world? Is God first in my life? Do I really and truly love His children? If one does not love God and love His children, one is not walking a life worthy of his or her calling. To the Thessalonians, Paul encourages the believers to live a life "worthy of God" who calls them into His "kingdom and glory" (**2 Thessalonians 2:12**). To the Ephesians, Paul, too, admonished the believers to "live a life worthy of the calling" (**Ephesians 4:1**). And last, but not least, the words of Paul to the Colossians are well worth citing for encouragement to live a holy life: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him" (**Colossians 2:6**).

Christians are to devote themselves to the things of God. Paul writes: "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness" (**Romans 6:13**). Once more, the question confronts every believer: What does it mean to walk in harmony with the new age? Paul answers the question. It means to *walk in Christ* (**12:3-8**) and to *walk in love* (**9-21**). Christian love demands humility (**12:3**). One is never to promote and honor oneself over and above other believers (**12:3-8**). Paul drives home this point when he writes: "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (**12:10**). Not only is this God's way for His people, but, at the same time, God does not want His people "lacking in zeal"; he wants them to keep their spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (**12:11**). How is your behavior toward God and toward one another? Listen to Paul as he endeavors to drive home the will of God for His people:

> The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. [14] Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (**13:12-14**)

Devotional Studies No. 20

Cruciality of the Cross

Is the Cross of Jesus crucial in your life? As one reflects upon the Cross of God's Anointed One, one is immediately confronted with the importance of the Cross of Jesus in God's scheme of redemption for lost humanity. When one tells the story of the Cross, one tells the story of the Gospel. If someone were to ask you, what is the Gospel of Redemption? What would you say? Surely, the answer is the Cross. God tasted death for every person. In the Cross of Christ, one sees forgiveness for the sins of both men and women. Out of one's response to God's way of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ, one meets responsibility face-to-face—a change in one's ethical behavior. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, one witnesses Jesus' teaching about the social implications of the Gospel.

One of these social teachings of Jesus focuses upon forgiveness, which behavior is often very difficult for God's people. Yet, this practice is one that lacks implementation among many Christians. Apart from the social implications, one is consciously aware that the Cross is not only the story of the Gospel, but is itself the history of the Gospel. This event in time changed the relationship between God and humanity as well as a change of relationships between men and women. Paul issues this admonition: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (**Ephesians 4:32**). One problem that stands in the way of forgiveness is bitterness. In order for one to practice forgiveness, one must eliminate this feeling from one's heart. Again, listen to Paul as he writes: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice' (**4:31**). God's forgiveness is demonstrated in the Cross. It is because of the Cross that individuals can forgive others. Forgiveness is just one aspect of the Cross of Jesus.

The Cross of Christ is not just one event in history among a dreary catalogue of unrelated events, but rather it is the big event. It is this event that gives meaning to the whole of life. In this central event of history, one sees the utter degradation of humanity as well as the deeper depth of God's holy love. The Cross of Christ reveals the real nature and meaning of evil in this world. In Christ's crucifixion, one sees sin acted out in all its naked blasphemy. This act of crucifixion, in and of itself, is not the darkest deed in all of history since many had been crucified. What makes this the darkest deed in all of history is the One who died there—Incarnate Righteousness and Love. Here was One in whose presence many felt the presence of God.

What does the Cross mean to you? Are you crucifying the Son of God afresh by

your lifestyle? Sin is seen at its worst in this crucifixion. It killed the Son of God. This is "absolute zero"; it is the very rock bottom of moral evil. Yet, in the crucifixion, one sees another story—God's love. In this horrible death, one observes God's atoning and redeeming action in the Passion of that Man upon the Cross. The Cross is not just theological fiction or some historical fact, but it is the event of God's amazing and costly wonder of forgiveness. The Cross is not only an act of Pilate, but an act of God—slain from the foundation of the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It is this Gospel that has moved the world. Has this Gospel moved you in the way you live and act? One cannot deny the benefits of the Cross by rejecting the social and moral implications of the Gospel.

In the Cross of Jesus, one sees righteousness and grace fused together. The Cross is something actual—it is love Incarnate. Even though Christ submitted Himself for crucifixion, nevertheless, Christ is not a passive victim in this drama of sin and salvation, but an actor from Gethsemane to Calvary, all for the redemption of humanity. On this Cross, one hears the cry of desolation—My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? He did this in order to prevent humanity crying out—My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Was Christ saying "amen" on behalf of humanity to the rightful judgment of God upon the sins of the world? This cry from the Cross reminds every believer of the utter desolation of the Son of God—utterly alone.

Jesus did something to human history. Do you just talk about the mysteries of the Faith? One may talk about religion by the hour, and yet it may not be the dominant and abiding motive of his or her life. Christ takes a back seat. One should always be conscious that the Church is not simply a body of people who hold to correct teaching, but rather the church holds to Christ as the Savior of the world. No Christian who has set himself or herself to do the will of God will spurn God's call for commitment. Are you committed to God's Gospel? What does the Cross of Jesus mean to you? Is the Cross of Jesus crucial in your life?

Devotional Studies

How Did the Disciples of Jesus Face Disaster?

How does one react to cancer? How does one react to financial difficulties? How does one react to a broken home? How does one react to death in the family? Many believers react in one of two ways: (1) one crumples before the disaster, or (2) one accepts the inevitable in a stoic way, that is to say, with almost inhuman fortitude. Neither of these reactions should be the response of the believer. One should turn his or her attention to the Apostles and to other disciples of Jesus in the first century in order to understand how they reacted to tragedy in their lives. Jesus is the answer to the heartbreaks of His people. The above questions are set forth in order to lay down the mindset of the early disciples as they faced the initial disaster of the Crucifixion of Jesus. Just a brief reflection upon His disciples' reaction before and after the Resurrection sets the stage for disciples of Jesus today. When one goes back almost two thousand years to the city of Jerusalem, one observes the sheer catastrophe of the crucifixion and the broken and discredited men and women who were followers of the Messiah. Yet, after the Resurrection of Jesus, one beholds men and women suddenly transformed into radiant, steady, and confident disciples of the Lord Jesus—no longer cowards.

The early disciples suddenly discovered themselves living in a new world—a world of joy, which joy experienced forgiveness of sins in and through Jesus. Fifty days after Christ's Resurrection, three thousand responded to the Good News of Salvation. About thirty years after Paul's acceptance of Christ as God's Way of salvation, he exclaimed: "He forgave us all our sins" (**Colossians 2:13**). To the Ephesians, he could write: "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (**Ephesians 1:7**). Even though the Romans wielded the hammer, nevertheless, it was, in actuality, Christ who wielded the hammer; He, himself, nailed the shame and sin to the Tree. He conquered sin and death. Paul captures the very heart and meaning of Christ's crucifixion with the following words: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" (**Romans 8:35**).

Remember, Jesus was a conqueror! It is in Jesus that individuals overcome tragedy in their lives. Again, listen to the words of Paul as he seeks to drive home the motivating power in his ministry, which power should also be the power of every believer:

> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
> 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[d] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height

nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (**Romans 8:37-39**)

How do individuals hear the preaching of the Gospel—Jesus died, He was buried, and He was Resurrected from the dead. Yes, God brought the Christian community, or church, into being in order to tell this wonderful story of His death that could not hold Jesus in the grave and that He is still lives. It was this conviction that enabled the disciples of Jesus to endure all kinds of trials and tribulations. As one reflects upon the early church, they were not looking back to Jesus as the greatest of the sons of Adam, but rather, they looked to Him as the Second Adam—the living Lord of a new creation. Their message centered on the Resurrection of Jesus. Paul's ministry and suffering was based upon the Resurrection. If the Resurrection did not occur, then there is the utter futility of it all: "And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (**1 Corinthians 15:14**). Without the Resurrection, the Cross of Jesus is just unrelieved tragedy. Without the Resurrection of Christ, the Church, too, is a vain and useless thing. Without the Resurrection of Jesus, death is still just a biological fact, no hope after death. But with the death and Resurrection of Jesus, death no longer holds dominion.

It is at the Cross and His empty tomb that one witnesses the final and decisive act of God in rescuing men and women from the dominion of darkness and transferring them into the kingdom of His dear Son (**Colossians 1:13-14**). These two events enabled the early Christians to face tragedy with perseverance. Remember, the early church did not revere the memory of a dead Jew, but they celebrated victory of sin and death through His death and Resurrection. The following words of Paul should be the desire of every believer: "To know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, some how, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (**Philippians 3:10-11**).

What does the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ mean to you? What does the church mean to you? Is the Church central to you in your life of devotion? One should commit to memory what Paul says to the Ephesian elders: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (**Acts 20:28**). What do the ensuing words of the author of the Book of Hebrews mean to you: "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace" (**Hebrews 10:29**).

Are we really serious about redemption? Are we, in actuality, sincere about commitment to Jesus? How do you feel about Sunday attendance? Do you frequently neglect to assemble with the saints to celebrate the death and Resurrection of Jesus? Do you stay away from the assembly of God's people in order to just have a good time on Sundays? What do the following words mean to you: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (**10:25**). The "Day approaching" depicted the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Christians ought not to forsake the assembling of themselves with God's people. Is Jesus our model in assembling with God's people? Listen to Luke as he tells about Jesus and the Sabbath day: "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his

custom" (**Luke 4:16**).

Bear in mind, the church is still the most important single phenomenon in God's scheme of redemption. The church is the means of continuing the story of redemption (see **2 Corinthians 4:1-7; 5:17—6:2**). The church stretches across two thousand years. The church has been able to subdue kingdoms and to work righteousness in the lives of men and women. It has been able to quench the fires of Europe's savage and licentious paganism through the proclamation of God's Good News of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus the Messiah. Yet, the church is made up of fallible human beings. In spite of all its tragic inconsistencies, division and degradation, one still finds life in God through Jesus Christ. The church must continue its fight against the ungodliness of men and women. Who is the godless person? One who is godless is anyone who is content to live without God in his or her life. Unless the world becomes more Christian than it is, it will become more and more ungodly than it has been before. Take away Christianity and civilization perishes. The church is a fellowship of individuals. In Christ, one escapes from the jungle of individualism. The community of Christ can only be a worshipping community—a praying and working community, which is to say, a city of God.

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[d] Or *nor heavenly rulers*

Devotional Studies

In Christ

God Comes to Meet Humanity

When individuals face danger or experience untold tragedy in their lives, they frequently cry out: "Where is God." The story is told of a young boy who viewed a picture of the Crucifixion of Jesus and said, "If God had been there!" Yet, God was there. This short exclamation discloses the glory and the mystery of the Incarnation. Christianity rests upon the fact that God was there in that awful bloody torture. It was God's design in order to reconcile the world unto Himself in and through Jesus' death and Resurrection from the dead. Even though one witnesses the very depth of the degradation of human nature in the Crucifixion of the Son of God, nevertheless, one, at the same time, observes God's highest revelation—Jesus as an atonement for the sins of the world.

As one peruses the four Gospels, one is not confronted with philosophical dogma, but rather with One who should be believed above any person who ever walked the face of this planet. God became Incarnate, which is to say, He became flesh. Jesus was not a phantom, or ghost, He was not an archangel, nor was He a demigod. He was God. Yes, He was both human and Divine. The author of Hebrews captures the essence of Christ's humanity this way:

> Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for[f] the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (**Hebrews 2:14-18**)

In the human life of Jesus, one meets God. Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (**John 14:9**). It is in Jesus that God is present and active in redeeming humanity. One can also say that it is in Jesus that God comes to meet men and women. Paul writes about this truth of the Gospel:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he

has committed to us the message of reconciliation.(**2 Corinthians 5:17-19**)

Christians should bow their heads in gratitude that God's presence—His very Self—is made manifest in the words and works of Jesus His Messiah. Jesus' message about Himself is quite revealing as to His preexistence and unique relationship with God the Father (see **John 17:1-5**). Pay attention to Jesus' priestly prayer: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (**17:5**). His language sets forth a unique oneness with God; He brings in a unique moral authority over men and women, an authority that exceeds any other authority on earth; He points to a ministry of salvation toward men and women that only He can accomplish; and, finally, He implies that He Himself is an exclusive master over the powers of evil.

In the Gospels, one witnesses Jesus speaking with authority. Even Matthew, about thirty years after the Sermon on the Mount, could not eliminate this concept of Christ's authority and teaching. He gives his editorial comments about the reaction of the people to this Sermon: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**Matthew 7:28-29**). Christ's teaching is embedded in the Gospels, especially the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is representative of His kingdom ethics. Also, within the Gospels, one is immediately confronted with the teaching that Jesus is charged by God with the redemptive recovery of the human race (see again **John 17:1-5**). For one to rebel against the Prince of Life, one experiences the very heart and core of sin in all its ugliness. As one examines his or her own life, one is conscious of the failures he or she suffers on a daily basis. One can only find redemption in and through the finished work of Christ upon the Cross.

Christ is the object of one's faith. For one to believe in Christ is to believe in God. When one worships God, one worships Christ. God's grace reminds each person of how one should live. When one reflects upon Christ purchasing the church with His blood, one should bow one's total life to God—"For me to live is Christ." What does the church mean to you? Remember, a living church is a worshipping church; it is not a people holding all the correct doctrines of a particular sect of God's people. Do you allow pleasure to keep you away from church? Do you allow---------? Why not fill in the blank yourself! Are your serious about salvation? Do you actually seek God in your life? Is God first in your life? Many claim to know God, but, at the same time, their actions deny Him (see **Titus 1:16**). Do you trample the Son of God under foot by your actions toward spiritual things? Do you insult the Spirit of grace by your lifestyle? Have you read the Book of Hebrews lately, especially Chapter ten? If not, why not take the time to read now?

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[f] Or *and that he might turn aside God's wrath, taking away*

Devotional Studies

Jesus:
The Message of Hope

Countless children are taught evolution in school, and, at the same time, they are also informed that God is a forbidden subject within the community school structure. Students are taught that they no longer need religion, especially Christianity, because science has replaced the need for God in one's life. Evolution is the "in" thing. For many individuals today, faith in God belongs to the childhood of humanity and is superseded by science. In spite of this philosophy, one easily recognizes that something is wrong with the world at large. One still witnesses war between nations, strife between races and ethnic religious groups, conflict between classes and political parties, physical and verbal abuse between husband and wife, and so on. Individuals still suffer anxiety, often to the point of despair. With this atheistic viewpoint comes a feeling of senselessness and hopelessness. From this sense of misery, countless individuals—adults and teenagers—commit suicide since they cannot fit themselves into society; they are a people devoid of hope.

Knowledge, in and of itself, leaves one high-and-dry in one's struggles to lift oneself out of the labyrinth, or web, of despair. In the world of sin and death, one observes the human race groaning under the burden of sin and longing for some hitherto undiscovered remedy that will relieve them from utter despair, or desolation. Even though the world is a globe of great knowledge, yet there is something more than information that is needed in order to develop peace in one's own life and freedom from strife in one's own relationship(s) with other individuals or nations. Something besides knowledge is needed in order to introduce harmony, unity, and friendship into human relationships. The thing needed is none other than Jesus the Prince of Peace. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified that is the answer to the sin problem and hope of humanity.

Before one can accept Christ as his or her Savior, one must come to the realization that he or she is a sinner. Everyone stands in need of God's grace. Every individual must come to the conviction that one has gone astray in his or her innermost being; one ought to say, "I am godless, loveless, self-seeking, and God-escaping." To cite Paul, one converted from Judaism to Christianity by Jesus Himself, is appropriate: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**). If one examines himself or herself, one discovers a heart that is self-seeking and self-centered. The heart is more concerned about the pleasures of life than it is about knowing and serving God. Even though some pleasures may be innocent, nevertheless, one must not allow the world to take priority over spiritual things. When one's life is committed to Christ, one must travel lightly, that is to say, one must give up some particular involvement(s) in order to make spiritual participation more revolutionary in one's spiritual commitment to Jesus as

Lord. Once one has become a member of Christ's company, one must be willing to give up some personal freedoms as a soldier of Jesus Christ. One may have to give up some of his or her time and energy for the kingdom of God. Yes, when one becomes a Christian, one must be ready to forsake some of his or her personal freedom. When one accepts Christ, one is now no longer an arbiter, or judge, of his or her own time and energy. God has entered the picture.

What can bring about change in one's attitude toward God and commitment toward spiritual things? It is the message of the Cross. The Gospel alone can go to the very root of one's spiritual ills, and, at the same time, cure the one who submits. The message of the Gospel is not so much about humanity finding God as it is about God finding men and women. God sent Jesus in order to reconcile humanity unto Himself. God took the initiative, not mankind. Jesus came in order to clear the way to God. Men and women cannot save themselves; God comes to the human race in and through Jesus. God assigns no good works to perform to inherit the gift of eternal life; it is a gift from God—a gift accepted by faith, not works. Once one is saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ then this necessitates responsibility on the part of the one saved. The message of salvation does not leave one idle. How can one appropriate the gift of salvation and, at the same time, or simultaneously, live a life in defiance, or rebelliousness, toward God's grace? If every believer would allow himself or herself to be anchored by faith in love, this faith then would transform one into a minister of reconciliation. Have you accepted the message of hope? God invites everyone to share in that glorious kingdom through Jesus. One must allow himself or herself to be changed from a self-seeking path to a God-seeking direction. One's daily walk with God should be as sacred as the public assembly on Sunday mornings. Christian ought not to neglect the gathering of the saints on Sunday to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and His coming again. Is there unity in your life between the work day(s) and Sunday? Are you made radioactive by the hearing of God's Word? Why not allow yourself to be changed from the self-seeking road to the God-seeking path?

Devotional Studies No. 22

One's New Life in Christ

While in prison, Paul writes to the believers in Colossae about their spiritual life. Chapter three begins with a call to reflect upon their new obligations. He reminds them of their baptism, which baptism marked the beginning of a new life. One is now confronted with a new set of obligations. Not only is the Gospel designed to put men and women in a new relationship with God based upon "righteousness by faith," but it also raises men and women from the inferior fascination of the world to a higher interest, an interest that seeks to give glory to God. These Christians departed from the old life of sin in their participation in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ through baptism. He is calling upon these individuals to live for those things that have eternal value. Unfortunately, many Christians still do not live their lives in such a way that it portrays that they belong to that higher world—the world in which he or she now lives and reigns.

Christians should constantly remind themselves that the dark chapter of their history of sin lies behind them. Paul stresses that in baptism they died with Christ and, at the same time, broke with the old life of sin and rebellion against God. For this reason, Paul goes right to the jugular vein of decision and says: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature" (**Colossians 3:5**). He begins this list of sins by calling attention to sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed (**3:5**). Next, he enumerates other sins—sins that find an outlet in speech. Again, one should pay attention to this list: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language (**3:8**). How do you measure up to this new chapter in your daily walk with God following your baptism? Do you read the Word of God daily? Do you gather with the saints on Sunday? Is there a difference in your life after your conversion to Christ? The Holy Spirit, through Paul, demands a complete change of nature. Every believer must put on the new self; in other words, there must be a complete renewal of one's activities.

For Paul, this new life must make an effort toward renewal—"renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This new relationship between God and humanity also demands an absence of race hatred among the people of God. The world at large was divided into factions, as is the world today. Paul speaks of Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian, and slave and free. The Greeks considered all foreigners barbarians; the Romans considered all foreigners Scythians. Paul, too, puts across the disappearance of these walls of separation to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians 3:28**). This knowledge that Paul addresses is not simply intellectual knowledge; but rather, this knowledge

depends on an inward renewal of one's nature. Paul states the core of his teaching this way: "but Christ is all, and is in all" (**Colossians 3: 11**).

Paul immediately reminds them of their high calling: "Therefore, as God's chosen people holy and dearly loved" (**3:12**). The dark chapter of their lives is to be replaced with new clothing. He then lists some of this clothing: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" (**3:12**). When dealing with believers, one often discovers that these enumerated characteristics are not always manifested in the life of God's children. Paul now turns his attention to how Christians are to relate to one another. How are Christians to react toward the unlovely? Listen once more to Paul as he goes right to the very heart of Christianity. He cuts away all underbrush as he states plainly the answer: "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (**3:13**). In Christ, one can no longer adhere to the practice that belonged to one's old nature. In Christ, one must now exhibit a nature of a different kind—forgiveness. Followers of Jesus are to have the same outlook on life as Christ Himself had. When one accepts Christ's gift of forgiveness, one, too, must share in that same forgiving spirit. Paul narrates it this way to the Romans: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (**Romans 15:7**).

How can one dress himself or herself with that attire mentioned in this short exhortation? The answer is found in reflection upon one's new status in Christ—"chosen people, holy and dearly loved." How does one make allowances for others? Paul's answer is "love." Again, he writes: "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (**Colossians 3:14**). Love acts as a girdle, or belt, that holds unity together. Without love, all of the other garments are useless. Paul addresses the bond of love to the Corinthians as the one thing that never fails (**1 Corinthians 13:8**). The first three verses of Colossians Chapter Three unfold the futility of good actions without love. Christians may carry out Christian duties, but, at the same time, remain hard and callous toward other believers and suspicious of other believer's motives. This kind of attitude repels rather than attracts others to Christ. And finally, Paul writes: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (**Colossians 3:15**). The "peace of Christ" is two-fold in nature: (1) reconciliation with God and (2) friendship with other individuals.

Since Christians are called to be members of one body, they are meant to exercise this peace-loving temper; that is to say, the love and peace inspired by Christ. Jesus tells His disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (**John 13:34-35**). Following this statement, Jesus also reminds them of His peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives" (**14:27**). Where there is peace within the hearts of God's children, differences can be overcome. The message of the Gospel of Christ is to be so deeply planted in the believer's mind that it controls all his or her actions and all his or her thinking. As one reflects upon His love and peace, this reflection should cause everyone to "be thankful" (**Colossians 3:15**). Are you thankful for God's mercy and forgiveness? If so, one should allow the likeness of Christ to envelope one's whole being.

Devotional Studies No. 19

Proclamation of Salvation and Its Appropriation

One stands in awe of Christ's love as one reflects upon Christ's demonstration of His love in the sacrificing of His body for the sins of humanity. This free forgiveness of sins is made available through faith and not works or performance of five ritualistic acts performed on Sunday morning, commonly called five acts of worship. One witnesses the wisdom of God in making salvation available to anyone who is willing to respond in faith, which response completes Reconciliation. God's mercy is revealed and offered in and through Christ.

One appropriates God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus as God's Way of salvation. When one puts his or her faith, or trust, in Christ, one is incorporated into God's new community of believers, which community represents Christ's body upon earth. Following one's faith in Christ for redemption, one submits himself or herself to baptism as a sign or seal of that which has already taken place inwardly. Baptism is also one of the means whereby one acknowledges that God's way of salvation is right. One's baptism testifies to one's acceptance of God's Way of salvation in and through Christ. There is some sense in which baptism places a seal upon the fact that the person baptized belongs to Christ.

As one thinks about faith in Jesus, one is conscious that faith comes through the proclamation of the message about Christ's atonement upon Calvary. Paul addresses the means whereby one comes to faith in Jesus: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (**Romans 10:17**). Preaching Christ crucified is the means whereby individuals learn of God's way of salvation. Preaching may seem foolish to men and women, but not so with God. Paul calls attention to God's methodology of reaching the lost: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (**1 Corinthians 1:21**). It is not foolish preaching, but, as far as the world is concerned, the preaching of a crucified savior is foolishness. Yet, it is this message, in spite of the world's view, God "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe"—Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

It is imperative that Christians share the message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. Again, Paul focuses upon the importance of preaching: "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (**Ephesians 1:13**). Once more, Paul zeros in on the

importance of preaching: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them (**Romans 10:14**)? The message of the Gospel stirs up faith. This message is about Christ as the Savior of the world. The Gospel is a "Divine Source" unto salvation. Listen again to the words of Paul as he goes right to the very heart of salvation:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last,[a] just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (**Romans 1:16-17**)

As Paul proclaimed the One who had been crucified, He had to give an outline of His life in order to describe Him as one "born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons" (**Galatians 4:4**). For Paul, Salvation on God's part was wholly of grace, but, on the part of men and women, it is wholly by faith. In other words, faith is the channel through which one receives God's righteousness. Paul expresses it this way: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Faith is the human condition of securing salvation. God's righteousness is received through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Cross (see **Romans 3:21-22**).

Even though one is justified by faith, one must never forget that "faith without works is dead." Paul also captures the kind of ethical behavior that follows one's acceptance of Christ: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (**Galatians 5:6**). One's acceptance of Christ as Lord demands growth in knowledge and holiness, that is to say, in spiritual apprehension of God's scheme of redemption and in ethical achievement. Faith is the ground on which justification is conferred upon men and women and, at the same time, the faculty that receives it.

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[a] Or *is from faith to faith*

Devotional Studies No. 15

Recapture the Spirit of Evangelism

As one approaches the subject of evangelism, one should reflect upon what God desires His people to proclaim. Just a casual reading of the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul reveal that the substance of early preaching in the church focused upon Christ as the Good News of God's Way of salvation. The Gospel is not about five acts of worship promoted by many believers. It is about the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ for the sins of humanity. God has given to His people this "message of reconciliation" in order to turn people from a life of sin to a life for God. In order to recapture the spirit of evangelism within the hearts and minds of every believer, one must concentrate upon the true meaning of the word *Gospel*. Every child of God is to reach out to the lost and to the saved. For any congregation of saints to grow in its outreach ministry of evangelism, there must be a consciousness, or awareness, that God gives to every individual this "message of reconciliation."

God's people should realize that God uses every Christian as His mouthpiece. Evangelism should be foremost, or first, in the hearts of God's children. For one to reach out to the lost, one's first loyalty must be to the Good News of God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ. As one reflects upon Christianity, one must remember that historic Christianity is first and foremost a Gospel, that is to say, the proclamation to the world concerning the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. When one announces the Gospel of God, one declares something that God has done for lost humanity in and through Jesus. Just a casual reading of the Synoptic Gospels reveals the essential meaning of the word *Gospel,* who is Jesus, the Messiah. He not only came preaching the Gospel, <u>He Himself is the Gospel.</u> Jesus not only brought Good News from God, but He Himself is God's Good News to the world. As one reflects upon the content of the Good News of God, one must call attention to His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

If one wishes to recapture the hearts of men and women, one needs to remember the very core and heart of the Gospel of God. The Gospel is about Jesus and His finished work upon the Cross for redemption. It is not a code of ethics or a philosophy of life; it is Good News about God's redemptive act in Christ. No, the Gospel is not a theology of ethics or a code of law or a pattern for a so-called worship service. It is Jesus! Christ is at the heart and center of the Gospel. The Gospel is a personal message to the world. The Gospel is not a doctrine or way of life, but rather, it is the Good News about a Person. The Gospel is the revelation of God in history. In the Gospel, God entered time. Even though the Gospel includes the life of Jesus, nevertheless, it is not a biography. Even though the Gospel includes the ethical teachings of Jesus, yet these teachings are not the

Gospel itself. The Gospel is the Good News that God has come for the emancipation of humanity from the kingdom of darkness. When one responds to the Good News of God's Way of salvation in and through Christ, God transfers that individual into His kingdom of light.

Within the Body of Christ, one is cognizant that the "body of Christ" is the visible manifestation of the Incarnation. This fellowship in the Gospel is more than just a voluntary association of like-minded people who have banded together for convenience or expediency; it is the Body of Christ. Christianity stands or falls on the Gospel of God. One can say that the Gospel of Christ is the source of all true theology; it is the motive behind all Christian ethics; it is the theme of preaching; it is the charter of evangelism; and it is the bond of fellowship among all God's people. Bear in mind, the Gospel is Good News because God has come in Jesus Christ for the emancipation of lost humanity. In the New Testament writings, one perceives that "preaching the Gospel" had to do with making known the Good News of God in Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians have confused their brand of instructions with the Gospel of God. As a result of false identification, one witnesses the idolizing of dogmas as Gospel. Thus, orthodoxy has blinded some believers to the glory of God in the face of Jesus who is Gospel. Numerous Christians are confused about what the Gospel of God is all about. As one reflects upon the Gospel, one beholds the eternal God revealed in history. Since the Gospel is the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, one is under obligation to evangelize. Evangelism is a mandate handed down by Christ to His disciples. It is a Divine imperative. Evangelism is not just the privilege of the so-called clergy; it is for the body of Christ as a whole. Every child of God is to be involved in this business of evangelism. There are no exceptions to this Divine imperative. In other words, there are no graduated hierarchy of privilege and responsibility so far as evangelism is concerned. Christians cannot and must not delegate this task to a selected few. Within the New Testament writings, one discovers the priesthood of all believers. There is no gap between clergy and laity. Every child of God is clergy, so to speak.

If the fellowship of God's people is to grow, everyone must recapture the spirit of evangelism of the early church. Some groups of believers are exclusive rather than inclusive concerning fellowship. For some the word *church* suggests its own distinctive fellowship or denomination. All Christians should recognize that the New Testament does not speak of the "church" as an institution. The church is the visible token of the Incarnation, that is to say, the church is the visible manifestation of God in the flesh. In other words, in the church, one sees the Eternal in a person, namely, Jesus. Again, the church is not an institutional structure; it is a holy Christian people. The church is simply Christ living in His people, both men and women. In the New Testament, one observes the following emphasis: the church is the gathered people of God. Some want to identify the church as assent to correct doctrinal teachings about a so-called worship service, that is, a worship service concerning the performance of five ritualistic acts. As a result, certain believers associate "correct doctrine" as equivalent to faith in Christ who is the Gospel of God. Today, the body of Christ is rent asunder by divisions of all kinds. Christians need to recapture the emphasis of the New Testament that the church is the gathered people of God. The church is simply Christ living in His people. Have you recaptured the sprit of evangelism? If not, why not?

Devotional Studies No. 18

Reevaluation of One's Relationship to Christ

As one reflects upon the make-up of the church, one should remember that regardless as to how "poor" in spiritual strength the church is, life without it would be even worse. Are you committed to Him who gives life? Have you lost your saltiness? Has the congregation as a whole lost its saltiness? The New Covenant Fellowship should never forget its drive, or aim, as a redemptive society. A church building is secondary, not the primary purpose of this fellowship. The objective is to strengthen the members and, at the same time, to win souls to Christ by sharing the message of salvation. In doing both of these activities, the body of Christ gives glory to God, which glory He deserves for His grace and love. In the ancient world of pagan Greece, one, in the study of history of their gods, observes that shrines outlasted the real vitality of the people. One objective of the New Covenant Fellowship is to encourage Christians not to lose their spiritual zeal for the things of God? As an individual, have you lost your vigor for the cause of Christ? Has your zeal for Christ died in spite of all the assets of spiritual blessings you have experienced in Christ. This congregation should be on its guard that it never falls into dull conformity. The believers in this congregation must direct the patterns of life for those who behold their profession of faith. The world cannot be saved by just coming together to sing three hymns and listen to the Word of God expounded. Is the needle of your life stuck in the groove, like an old phonograph player? If so, you need to recapture your zeal for the things of God.

As this congregation begins another Lord's Day, hopefully, every person present is seeking to reach out to others in order to strengthen them in their faith and to lead others into a relationship with God. In order to accomplish this objective, every believer must make a commitment to serve Jesus Christ. I encourage each of you to utilize the sermons written by me (Dallas Burdette) as an evangelistic tool to reach out to your relatives and friends. If you want this congregation to grow, everyone must become actively involved in soul winning. Do you remember the words of Paul concerning ministry? Listen to him as he drives home his point about outreach: "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**1 Corinthians 5:19**). Yes, this means you!

As you reflect upon your own spiritual life, you should search your soul to see what your spiritual relationship to God is. Is your spiritual life on a low-ebb? Or are you zealous for the things of God? Is God a part of your daily life? It goes almost without saying—a godless person is one who is content to live without God. Are you living without God? Is the church in your plans for Christian service? The faith of the church is not only relevant, but also urgently necessary. Without Christianity, civilization will not remain. Some Christians seem to discount the importance of the church in their lives.

Many desire to live their lives in isolation from Christianity. It is only in Christ that one escapes from the jungle of individualism—doing one's own thing. In spite of the church's shortcomings, one can still say that the church is, in spite of everything, the most important single phenomenon that human history has to show.

Just a brief reflection upon the Christian faith, one quickly discovers that Christianity is not just intellectual curiosity about the facts of the Bible, but rather, it is commitment. Christ lives, not in one's intellectual assent to the truth about Himself, but rather in the life that one pours out on His behalf. Unless men and women give, as it were, their life's blood to Christ, Christ remains a ghost and the story of faith is only a venerable and crumbling ruin. Christianity is not an academic exercise, like a crossword puzzle or riddle waiting for solution. Faith alone is not enough for God, but the cost must also be there. Just a casual glance of the church in the New Testament reveals that God established a new relationship through Jesus Christ, which individuals then share in the New Covenant, that is, a new aeon, or age. In Christ, one witnesses a new humanity.

Are you a part of this new humanity? Is your life a life of worship? The whole life of the Christian is worship, that is to say, 24—7. The church is a community of believers, not an ecclesiastical organization. It is essentially a fellowship of persons and not an institution. The church is God's people, the elect of God. The church is the fellowship of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Does the church mean anything to you? Hopefully, your answer is YES!

Devotional Studies

Self-Examination of One's Realationship to Christ

Paul writes to the Corinthians about their relationship to Christ. This admonition is still as relevant today as it was in the first century. Many profess faith in Christ, but, at the same time, their actions indicate that something is missing in their perspective of what Christianity is all about. In this Epistle, Paul writes: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless of course, you fail the test" (**2 Corinthians 13:5**)? This text invites every believer to look into his or her heart in order to determine what is in it. This examination is about "the faith," that is to say, it is about the message of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the Cross. Paul is concerned as to whether or not the Corinthians have fully understood the preaching of the Cross. Today, this same question confronts every believer. How many Christians have understood the preaching of the Cross? How many believers have made this message of the Cross foremost in their lives?

Paul wants to know if the preaching of the Cross has just reached their minds or if it has pierced their hearts. In this short text, he not only wants Christ to apprehend the Corinthians, but he wants them to apprehend Christ. God apprehended them through the message of the Cross, but some, apparently, did not apprehend Him? In other words, Paul wants God's sovereignty to infect every believer. He wants God to be Lord of everyone's life. As Christians today reflect upon **2 Corinthians 13:5**, each one should inquire as to what his or her faith is all about.

What does this Scripture convey to the people of God today? Does believing make a difference in your life? Are you the same with or without your belief in the message of salvation? When one professes faith in Christ, the world expects differences in one's life that separates him or her from those who do not believe in Christ. It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Corinthians. The Corinthians were constrained to give some kind of account for their behavior. How is your behavior? Are you still happy about your faith. Are your hearts glad about God's revelation of Himself in and through Jesus? Is this joy now foreign to you? Have you lost your first love? If so, your faith is not very deep. Is your faith just lodged in your understanding and not in your heart? Paul wants faith in Christ to penetrate into one's heart. Is there gratitude in your heart for spiritual things? What about Sunday gatherings? Do you relish your time together with other saints or do you resent the time spent on Sundays in praising God within the corporate body of Christ? Paul writes to the Colossians about this very issue of one's attitude toward spiritual things:

> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (**Colossians 3:15-17**)

When one praises God, something else stands out in one's life, that is, God's omnipotence, His Holiness, His majesty, and His greatness. As one reflects upon God, one ought to be caught up in wonder and struck with awe and bow in adoration for His love for lost humanity. Do the pleasures of life take priority over God? Is God first in your life? Do you desire to serve God more than to enjoy the pleasures of life or the pleasures of sin for a season? Paul, in the Philippian Epistle, sets forth his own examination about his own faith in Christ. Listen to Paul as he opens his heart to the Philippians:

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [8] What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. [10] I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, [11] and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (**Philippians 3:7-11**)

The primary vocation of the Christian life is the same for all believers, not just the preacher in the pulpit. Christians are here in the world to love God and to love one's neighbor. They are here to serve God. The Christian life is a vocation that is to be woven into the very fabric of one's being. Paul writes to the Romans: "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (**Romans 14:8**). Do you believe this Scripture? Many Christians today live as if they are their own masters. Christians today fail in the purpose of their lives because they love the world more than they love God. Is Jesus the center and heart of your faith? If God is not foremost in one's life, one wonders how anyone can effectively reach out to others. Do you believe in the resurrection of the dead and in the life of the world to come? If so, why not examine yourself to see if you are in the faith?

Devotional Studies No. 21

Sunday Gatherings

As one approaches the subject of attendance each week with the assembled saints, one treads upon unsettled soil. Many people look upon church attendance as something that is not very important in their lives. "I just prefer to do my own thing" is the reaction of many toward the church. Others respond, "I just prefer to worship God in my own way." Others are quick to reply: "I just worship at my home." During my fifty-five years of ministry, I have observed that Sunday meetings are not very important to many believers. For instance, Sunday is a day to visit relatives or friends; Sunday is a day to go hunting; Sunday is a day to go fishing; Sunday is a day to sleep late. Sunday is almost a day for everything except God! Is Sunday essential in your spiritual life? If not, it should be!

As one reflects upon the gathering of Christians, one recalls the words of the author of Hebrews as he sought to nip-in-the-bud the attitude of some concerning the importance of gathering to encourage one another: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (**Hebrews 10:25**). "The Day approaching" is not Sunday bur rather AD 70—the destruction of Jerusalem. In spite of danger to one's life, they were still told not to abandon the habit of meeting together. Are Christians no longer obligated to meet together? What is this Scripture saying to you? In the first century, Christians were facing untold dangers by assembling, but they were told not to abandon, that is to say, give up, the practice of meeting together. Today, Christians are not abandoning the assembly for fear of punishment but rather from a lack of concern for spiritual things. In all fairness to the text, one must state that there is a difference between an occasional miss and one who actually gives up the assembly.

Apparently, many who profess Christ seek to be secret disciples of Jesus. Just a brief reflection upon this unhealthy attitude reveals that discipleship kills secrecy or secrecy kills discipleship. In the early church, Christians did not live in isolation from each other, but rather in fellowship with each other. Jesus, in establishing His own community of believers, put an end to the solitariness of the individual. As believers, we live not only for ourselves, but we also live for the sake of others. If one wishes to remain strong in Jesus, one cannot neglect or abandon the fellowship of the church. Why is church attendance important? Church attendance demonstrates to the world as well as to other Christians where one's loyalty lies. When one gathers with the saints, this

attendance gives one a chance to show which side he or she is on. Can one live a Christian life and abandon the fellowship of the church?

Sunday gatherings should be a time of delight. In **Hebrews 10:25**, as cited above, the writer reveals one of the purposes in meeting together: "encourage one another." This activity is the duty of every believer. When Christians assemble, they come together to encourage or be encouraged. They also gather in order to feast upon God's written revelation. The words of Eliphaz to Job still ring as true today for Christians as it did in Job's day. Listen to the words of Eliphaz: "Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. 4 Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees" (**Job 4:3-4**). The assembly of God's people is one place where individuals find comfort and strength for "faltering knees."

What is your custom, or habit, about the Sunday meetings? Do you imitate Christ in your willingness to meet with God's people on a regular basis? What is your practice about the public assembly of God's people? What custom, or routine, did Jesus have concerning the day set aside for God's people to fellowship and to hear the Word of God read? Listen to Luke as he captures the pattern of Jesus regarding the Sabbath: "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him" (**Luke 4:16-17a**). Why do many Christians today fail or neglect to observe this custom? The answer lies in the fact that far too many Christians are too involved with the pleasures of the world

Remember, faithfulness in church attendance encourages others and provokes to good works as well as to identify whose side you are on. Church membership and attendance are outward symbols of one's inner commitment to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, far too many Christians are just nominal members. Even though these believers are sincere, yet they are superficially Christian. Their faith is shallow; they have very little spiritual history; they are not growing in spiritual insight; and they are spiritually asleep. They are "neither hot nor cold" (**Revelation 3:16**). One who regards church attendance on Sunday as an optional matter is not seriously interested in the new life in Christ. Sunday attendance should never depend simply upon one's own impulse, notion, whim, fancy, or personal convenience.

Having written the above, one must ever be conscious that church "going" is not the very heart of Christianity even though it is important. In other words, church attendance can be, if one is not careful, a sign of weakness rather than a sign of spiritual strength. Just going to church without a commitment to Christ is of no avail. One should attend church, or assembly, because of one's commitment to the cause of Christ. During my ministry, I have heard countless Christians express their views about Sunday: "I have done my duty for the week." Christianity is more than just church attendance. The church must be a fellowship of the committed. This is because mere belief is never enough. For one to be effective in God's kingdom, the church must play an important role in the lives of God's people. Without the Body of Christ, one cannot reach Christian vitality in its fullness. Commitment to Christ will not be effective apart from a committed fellowship. Men and women need the fellowship of the church because they are weak and sinful. What do the following words of Jesus mean to you: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"?

Devotional Studies No. 14

The Christian Faith

The Christian faith confronts everyone with the question: why Christ? The Christian faith is simply "faith" in Jesus the Christ. Unfortunately, the Christian church has focused more on biblical understanding of doctrine than it has upon faith in Jesus Christ. If the church had focused more on the confession of faith, which alone is contained in the New Testament, the Christian community could have avoided many pitfalls, which snares have proliferated into numerous divisions within the body of Christ. Biblical faith focuses more upon trust and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. When one puts his or her trust in the Lord, this trust puts one in fellowship with Him. This kind of trust is essentially what faith means in the New Testament writings—fellowship with the living Lord.

Faith in Christ is the starting point of one's walk with God, not grasp of abstract truth concerning doctrinal issues that many Christians are divided over. The faith that justifies is the faith that puts its trust in "the truth," namely Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus responded to a question posed by Thomas: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**John 14:6**). Many believers identify their understanding of the Scriptures as the "truth" that the Bible speaks of. For example, one of the most quoted Scriptures by many believers, especially those within the Churches of Christ, focuses upon **John 8:31-32**: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." When one fails to read the context of **John 8:31-32**, one can manipulate this passage to give validity to one's sectarian attitude toward those who do not see eye-to-eye with some narrow interpretation of Scripture foisted by himself, or some exclusive band of believers, which odd interpretation is founded upon some particular Scripture taken out of context.

The question that confronts every reader is: what is the "teaching" that Jesus alludes to? Earlier in this Chapter, the religious leaders challenged the testimony of Jesus about Himself as not valid (**8:13**). Jesus countered their negative remarks by calling attention to His testimony as defensible (**8:14**); He asserted: "I know where I came from and where I am going" (**8:14b**). John said that Jesus "spoke these words while teaching in the temple area" (**8:20**). Again, Jesus says, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world" (**8:23**). Once more, Jesus informs them: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be" (**8:24**). Just before He comments about holding to His teaching (**8:31**), He repeats, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be" (**8:28**). Returning once more to Jesus' statement about "the truth" setting one free, one discovers that the truth is Jesus, not the convoluted arguments about a so-called

worship service with five prescribed rituals performed on Sunday morning. Jesus' testimony about His preexistence and His mission for redemption should settle the question: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (**8:36**).

Jesus is Himself the content of faith and ultimate truth, which statement is a radical departure from the ordinary conception of truth. The focus today, at least among many Christians, is not Jesus, but rather a correct understanding of the tradition of the local body of believers. This short essay seeks to focus, or concentrate, upon Jesus as the object of one's faith. John records another informative statement about Jesus: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (**1:17**). One can say that with the coming of Jesus, grace and truth came into its full form, or bloom. In other words, not only are grace and truth manifest in Jesus, but also it is in Him that grace and truth comes to its full realization. Truth is something that happens, which God does. It is only in Him that God the Father can be known. It is only in Him that one can be reconciled unto God the Father. The message of the Gospel is about the Incarnation of the Son who is "truth." With the coming of Jesus, one is confronted with the only redemptive fact. It is in Him and Him alone that one comes fact-to-face with the Divine realization of the eternal purpose of God for lost humanity. Jesus' preaching began with a call to repentance and the announcement of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is revealed and grounded in the Incarnate Son.

In the Incarnation, God reveals Himself as the God who approaches humanity. Christians need to recapture the coming of Jesus as an act of God. If one wishes to know God, one must come to know the One who reconciles men and women to God. The Gospels and the Epistles set forth the biblical message of redemption by disclosing the following: Christ coming down from above, God sending His Son, Christ self-giving of Himself for reconciliation with God, Christ's taking upon Himself human flesh, His going to the Cross to set men and women free from condemnation, and so on. The message of the Gospel is about God revealing Himself in His Son and reconciling lost humanity unto Himself in and through His Son Jesus. This One who is called Jesus has also a functional name—the Messiah. For one to believe in Him is to bow to His Sovereign Will in order to please Him. It is in Him, that God reveals the "mystery" of redemption that had been kept secret even before God spoke this universe into existence. Jesus the Christ is God's act of atonement for the sins of humanity. One must never forget that even in the sufferings of Christ upon Calvary, God is the One who is active and giving. God is the initiator.

One cannot grasp the significance of Christ apart from His suffering upon the Cross. It is through this event that God establishes fellowship with men and women. The entire Bible must be read with reference to this basic theme of redemption. The death of Christ is unique; it happened once for all. Just a brief reflection upon the nature of fellowship with God reveals that God requires a response on the part of sinful humanity—responding faith. In repentance, which God calls for in one's response to Jesus, there is a surrender of one's sinful will that is estranged from God. Remember, the Gospel of Jesus Christ begins with repentance (**Matthew 4:17**). God's grace becomes judgment when one refuses to repent. Listen to Jesus as he informs Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (**John 3:16**). Jesus further remarks: "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one

and only Son" (**3:18**). The righteousness of God, according to Paul, is revealed without the assistance of the Law (**Romans 3:21**). The righteousness from God can only be obtained through faith in Jesus the Christ (**1:17**).

With repentance and baptism, one should experience a change of disposition as one surrenders his or her life to Jesus. Paul writes about this change to the Romans: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? [4] We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (**6:3-4**). The old person dies, that is to say, the old person is annihilated. Every person who is baptized enters into His death. God draws the baptized person into the Death of His Son. God draws each individual into His Death. Again, one witnesses God's grace; salvation is not the work of men and women. God wants a "yes" from men and women in their response to Jesus as Lord, but, at the same time, He wants a "no" to the ways of the world. Repentance is the death of the one who has deserted God. What does faith in Christ mean to you? For the believer, it means trust in Jesus for salvation; it means to live for the Lord and to be His instrument and to be His servant. Why Christ?

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[f] Or *his only begotten Son*

Devotional Studies No. 11

The Christian Life Is Commitment to Christ

Joshua speaks to the children of Israel with the following words: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (**Joshua 24:15**). Every individual is confronted with two choices—God or Satan. Apart from faith in the God who created the world, one is condemned to failure. Meaning to life itself can only be found in the One who gives life. One cannot transcend one's humanity apart from God. If one wishes to understand himself or herself, one must begin with God's existence. Just a perusal of the Old Testament writers reveals that none of the writers sought to prove the existence of God. They moved among ideas that presuppose God's existence—a Being who has made fellowship available with Himself.

Fellowship with God is made accessible to individuals through faith in His Son Jesus. For the believer, one's knowledge of God is given in the revelation of Himself in and through Christ. One's consciousness of God's wrath and love is unfolded, or rooted, in God's revelation of Himself in and through Jesus Christ (**John 14:8**). The God of eternity that is revealed to humanity in Scripture is the God who formed a new community through Christ to curb sin and bring salvation to a lost and dying world (**Ephesians 1:3-14; 3:7-13**). In this new society, or fellowship of redeemed ones, God created a people for good works (**2:8**). This new community of God is to tell others about God's saving actions in and through His Son Jesus (**1 Peter 2:9**).

When men and women refuse to recognize God's existence and the coming of God in Christ to the world of sin, one witnesses the enigma of darkness that envelops the hearts of men and women—depravity running wild (**Romans 1:18-32**). Without a belief in the existence of God revealed in Holy Scripture, life is at the mercy of meaningless happenings. Without a consciousness of the God of the Bible revealed in Jesus, one beholds individuals who have consciences that are seared with hot irons, so to speak (**1 Timothy 4:2**). Without a belief in the Creator God, one is confronted with radical evil that permeates the hearts of men and women—evil that defeats and baffles human aspirations. Even though one cannot understand the very nature of evil, nevertheless, one can fight evil through one's commitment to Jesus.

One's own existence testifies to the belief that God exists. The complexities of the human body are too vast to be grasped by the finite, or limited, mind. There is heavy weight for one's belief in God's existence (**Romans 1:18-20**). Apart from one's faith in God, the world presents itself as a dark mystery, or puzzle. The world of Iraq with its Islamic faith witnesses to the springs of action that lies deep in ignorance and madness,

especially among revolutionary extremists. The Christian church is to act as "light" and "salt" for the preservation and stability in society (**Matthew 5:13-16**). Christians are called out of the world to be members of God's new kingdom of grace. Not only are Christians called into God's new society of humanity, but they are also called upon to participate as priests to serve God (**1 Peter 2:9**). In this Scripture, Peter calls attention to responsibility: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." When one enters into Christ, one is sent back into the world to serve God there and to bring about a transfiguration in the lives of men and women for God's glory.

Christians are called into the service of God. It is in this vein that Paul addresses the Christians in Ephesus: "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (**Ephesians 4:1**). Again, Paul writes: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (**2 Corinthians 5:20**). Prior to this statement, he, no doubt, startles the Corinthians by stating: "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation" (**5:19**). John addresses the seven churches of Asia this way: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" (**Revelation 1:5-6**). When God calls men and women into His service, He desires their co-operation and partnership in the range of reaching out to lost humanity.

If one does not choose to commit one's life to the cause of Christ, one soon finds himself or herself drifting in the sea of meaninglessness. One cannot live a life that is pleasing to God without commitment to His cause. The church is the abiding witness to God's revelation of Himself in and through Christ. For some individuals who profess faith in God and Christ, the church is not very important. But loyalty to Christ implies membership in the new society of Christ, which spiritual order He founded (**Revelation 2:1—3:22**). If one withholds his or her allegiance to the work of God, one weakens his or her influence in the community of the redeemed (**1 Peter 2:12**). The fellowship of God's people is not limited to just one's particular local body of believers. Many Christians have shut themselves up within the walls of their own orthodoxy. Christians are to love one another even as Christ has loved them. Are you committed to Christ? Remember, Christians are called out of the world only to be sent back into the world to share God's Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus (**Colossians 1:13-14, 24-25—2:1-5**).

The church is necessary in the scheme of God's redemptive fellowship. It is through the church that God's way of salvation is proclaimed. The church promotes love for all. The church is an association that unites individuals with individuals through the blood of Christ shed upon Calvary for one's redemption (**Acts 20:28**). Christians need to convey the idea that men and women are created in the "image" of God (**Genesis 1:17**). If one interprets the cosmos, or universe, in terms strictly related to humanity, one observes human beings as simply things, that is to say, human beings have no meaning, and value disappears. Islamic radicals are a classic point in which human beings have no meaning or value. When one loves another person, there is complete and unreserved commitment to one's well being. When one is wholly committed to God, one respects life (**James 1: 26-27; I John 2:7-11; 3:11-24**) . With God, partial devotion is not enough; there must be unlimited and unconditional devotion (**Revelation 2:4-5; 3:1-3; 3:15-17**).

Whatever one hangs one's heart on and confides in is one's God. Jesus expresses it this way: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (**Matthew 6:24**). And finally, one should come to grips with Jesus' statement to an expert in the Law:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (**Matthew 22:37-40**)

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[a] Deut. 6:5

[b] Lev. 19:18

Devotional Studies No. 12

The Divine and Human Encounter

One encounters God by faith in His Son Jesus. With the coming of Jesus, God encountered humanity with all its sinfulness. John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah came announcing the Good News of God's kingdom concerning the forgiveness of sins. In the Law of God, one comes face-to-face with his or her sinfulness; that is to say, one's life lived in contradiction to God. Even though sinners cannot live without God, nevertheless, they live without fellowship with God and are under His wrath. Through one's encounter with God in and through Jesus, one is set free from God's wrath and comes under Divine grace. For one to have fellowship with God, one must accept His Son Jesus as the Way to the Father. For one to experience the Divine encounter with God, one can only experience this encounter through Jesus, not law. Even though Christians delight in God's Law, nevertheless, they rely upon Jesus for reconciliation with God, not law or tradition. Fellowship with God is not through law keeping, but through faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus ends the legal relationship between God and humanity.

Just a casual reading of the Book of Romans reveals that that God broke through His own Law in order to bring about reconciliation. In other words, God broke the curse attached to the Law with His presence in Jesus as Atonement for the sins of humanity. When one accepts Jesus as his or her Atonement, the human "I" is dethroned and God is enthroned in one's life. With one's transference from the old aeon (Law) to the new aeon (grace), one receives the righteousness of God by faith in and through Jesus. One can refuse God's invitation or one can accept His grace. If one wishes to have a human encounter with God, one can only come to God through repentance and belief in His Son. In redemption, God does not annul the human will. In the Book of Revelation, one hears the familiar words of Jesus: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (**Revelation 3:20**). Again, John, too, writes in his Gospel about human initiative: "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (**John 1:12**).

When one accepts Jesus as Lord in one's life, this acceptance demands a radical change in one's behavior. The Gospel of God furthers one's obedience of repentance and faith in Jesus. In Christ, God wills that every person respond to His will with a "yes." In order to help men and women in their obedience, God imparts His Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Jesus. Through one's repentance, one condemns the old person and, in actuality, puts off the old self. In other words, the old person dies and the new person lives in and through Jesus. It is in Jesus that God actually creates a new person. It

is in this vein that Paul writes: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! [18] All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (**2 Corinthians 5:17-18a**). In Christ, one receives from God a righteousness that is outside humanity, namely Christ. Paul removes all the underbrush—explanation—when he writes to the Corinthians in his first written correspondence concerning God's wisdom in making Jesus one's righteousness: "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (**1 Corinthians 1:30**). The Divine and human encounter is realized only in and through Jesus.

Jesus who reconciles humanity to the Divine usually is set on the back burner in many fellowships. Unfortunately today, many Christians are not focusing upon a Divine encounter with God through Jesus Christ. Numerous Christians concentrate more attention on tradition than on Jesus and Him crucified. The Christian community is divided, often times, into warring factions. These various divisions within God's family result from a so-called faith in their orthodoxy of hand-me-down traditions from well-intentioned church fathers. One can state emphatically that faith in prevailing attitudes has never created a new person. Correct understanding of doctrines, right or wrong, does not bridge the gap between God and humanity. Many Christians, unconsciously, equate their understanding of God's Word with the Word itself. Regrettably, orthodoxy does not recognize the distinction between the Word of God and one's interpretation of God's Word.

Just a casual review of the Book of Romans and the Book of First Corinthians reveals that the primary commission of the Christian community is not "rules and regulations," but the proclamation of God's Good News of salvation by grace through faith in His Son Jesus. This proclamation is about where and how the Divine and the human meet—the Divine and human encounter. God, in reaching out to men and women, did not deliver a course of lectures in dogmatic theology or submit a confession of faith or deliver a set of by-laws for redemption. One of the basic errors of many Christians is the overvaluation of their rites and beliefs. Scores of narrow sects disqualify the great body of Christians who refuse to subscribe to their narrow and fanatical teachings.

The real Revelation of God is in the Incarnation. It is and through Jesus that one experiences the Divine encounter with God. It is in the Incarnation (God becoming flesh) that one witnesses the entrance of God into the sphere of the lives of men and women. In the Incarnation, one observes the self-manifestation of God in His Son. What is faith? One can state categorically that faith is not doctrine (traditions of the church), but rather it is a personal encounter with God through Jesus. Faith involves trust, obedience, and love. If one wishes to understand God, one must turn to His Word, that is to say, His written Revelation called the Bible. From beginning to end, the Bible is a book that discloses God's scheme of redemption for lost humanity. Do you wish to become a part of God's elect, that is, the redeemed? If so, then cling to His Revelation in Jesus Christ—believe in Him. If one knows Him, one understands that he or she has eternal life.

If one wishes this Divine human encounter with the Creator of the universe, one must become a part of God's elect through Jesus. Election of humanity is two fold. There is the Divine element and the human element. In other words, God's Divine election takes place in Christ, but to become a part of God's elect, one must respond to the

message of salvation by grace. What is preached today in many pulpits about election is simply the product of speculative thinking. God's election of individuals is not arbitrary, but rather, it is based upon one's acceptance of God's message of salvation in and through Christ. In the Epistle of Ephesians, Paul writes about this in great detail (**Ephesians 1:3-14**). Listen to Paul as he seeks to capture the core of how to become a part of God's elect:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (**1:13-14**)

In conclusion, if one desires to enter this Divine human encounter, one must submit to baptism, which Jesus commanded. Baptism is not a work, but rather a gift from God. Yet, in one sense, baptism is more than just a gift to men and women, it is an active receiving and confession on the part of humanity of God's Way of salvation—the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Baptism is not only an act of grace from God, but it is also an act of confession that God's Way of salvation is right. In some sense, it appears that in baptism, God acts and forgives sins and regenerates the one who confesses Jesus as Lord. In baptism, the one being immersed says "yes" to God, and God says "yes" to the one being baptized. Upon one's baptism, God adds one to His community, or church, upon earth. The church is simply a group of believing Christians saved by grace through faith in the atoning work of Christ upon the Cross. The church is a living fellowship—a fellowship made up of individuals saved by grace. Some people do not meet with God's people, but individualism (separation from the church) is just as foreign to the New Testament church as the idea of an institutional church. The church is not an organization, but an organism. Have you had an encounter with the Divine?

Devotional Studies

The Gospel of Christ and Growth in the Christian Community

Christians are striving for growth in spiritual strength as well as numbers. Many congregations have set objectives for growth in church attendance by the end of this year (2006). In order to reach one's objective in church growth, one must recapture the very heart of church growth—the Good News of God's way of salvation by grace through faith in God's Son. In other words, one's first loyalty must be to the Good News of God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ. As one reflects upon Christianity, one must remember that historic Christianity is first and foremost a Gospel, that is to say, the proclamation to the world the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. When one announces the Gospel of God, one declares something that God has done for lost humanity in and through Jesus. Just a casual reading of the Synoptic Gospels reveals the essential meaning of the word *Gospel,* who is Jesus, the Messiah. He not only came preaching the Gospel, He, Himself, is the Gospel. Jesus not only brought Good News from God, but He was God's Good News to the world. As one reflects upon the content of the Good News of God, one must call attention to His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

If one wishes to capture the hearts of men and women, one needs to remember the very core and heart of the Gospel. The Gospel is about Jesus and His finished work upon the Cross for redemption. It is not a code of ethics or a philosophy of life; it is Good News about God's redemptive act in Christ. No, the Gospel is not a theology of ethics or a code of laws or a fastidious, or exacting, pattern for a so-called worship service with five prescribed rituals. It is Jesus! Christ is at the heart and center of the Gospel. The Gospel is a personal message to the world. The Gospel is not a doctrine or way of life, but rather, it is the Good News about a Person and what that Person has done for humanity in its wretched and bleak condition (**Galatians 1:3-4**). The Gospel is the revelation of God in history. In the Gospel, God entered time. Even though the Gospel includes the life of Jesus, nevertheless, it is not a biography. Even though the Gospel includes the ethical teachings of Jesus, yet these teachings are not the Gospel itself. The Gospel is the Good News that God has come for the redemption of the world (**John 3:16-18**).

Within the Body of Christ, one is cognizant that the "body of Christ" is the visible manifestation of the Incarnation. This fellowship in the Gospel is more than just a voluntary association of like-minded people who have banded together for convenience or expediency; it is the Body of Christ. Christianity stands or falls on the Gospel of God. One can say that the Gospel of Christ is the source of all true theology; it is the motive behind all Christian ethics; it is the theme of preaching; it is the charter of evangelism; and it is the bond of fellowship among all God's people. Bear in mind, the Gospel is Good News because God has come in Jesus Christ for the emancipation of lost humanity.

In the New Testament writings, one perceives that "preaching the Gospel" had to do with making known the Good News of God in Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians have confused their brand of instructions with the Gospel of God. As a result of false identification, one witnesses the idolizing of dogmas as Gospel. Thus, orthodoxy has blinded some believers to the glory of God in the face of Jesus who is Gospel. Numerous Christians are confused about what the Gospel of God is all about. As one reflects upon the Gospel, one beholds the eternal God revealed in history. Since the Gospel is the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, one is under obligation to evangelize. Evangelism is a mandate handed down by Christ to His disciples. It is a Divine imperative. Evangelism is not just the privilege of the so-called clergy; it is for the body of Christ as a whole. Every child of God is to be involved in this business of evangelism. There are no exceptions to this Divine imperative. In other words, there is no graduated hierarchy of privilege and responsibility so far as evangelism is concerned. Christians cannot and must not delegate this task to a selected few. Within the New Testament writings, one discovers the priesthood of all believers. There is no gap between clergy and laity. Every child of God is clergy, so to speak.

If the community of Christ, or the church, is to grow, believers must recapture the spirit of evangelism of the early church. Some groups of believers are exclusive rather than inclusive concerning fellowship. For some the word *church* suggests its own distinctive fellowship or denomination. The new humanity of God recognizes that the New Testament does not speak of the "church" as an institution or an ecclesiastical organization. The church is the visible token of the Incarnation, which is to say, the church is the visible manifestation of God in the flesh. In other words, in the church, one sees the Eternal in a person, namely, Jesus. Once more, Christians need to bear in mind that the church is not an institutional structure; it is a holy Christian people. The church is simply Christ living in His people, both men and women. In the New Testament, one observes the following emphasis: the church is the gathered people of God. Some want to identify the church as assent to correct doctrinal teachings about a so-called worship service, that is, a worship service concerning the performance of five ritualistic acts. As a result, certain believers associate "correct doctrine" as equivalent to faith in Christ who is the Gospel of God. Today, the body of Christ is rent asunder by divisions of all kinds. Christians need to recapture the emphasis of the New Testament about the church—the church is the gathered people of God. The church is simply Christ living in His people.

Devotional Studies No. 10

The Gospel, the Church, and the Bible in the Lives of God's People

It is time that Christians reexamine what the Gospel and the Church and the Bible really mean in their every day walk with God. Has the Good News of God made a difference in your way of life? Has the Christian community made a modification in your walk with God? Has the written Revelation of God altered your life with the Trinity? What is your reaction to God's grace? If you wish to understand the true meaning of the word *Gospel* and the role that the Church plays in one's individual life, one must go to the ultimate authority—the Word of God. Is your life under the influence of the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ with its call for repentance and transformation of one's priorities? Is your body, soul, and spirit under God's authority that is set forth in His Holy Scripture? If so, then your life is a time of peace and joy in believing all that the prophets have written concerning Jesus and His kingdom.

Once again, is your walk a stroll under God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus? What does it mean for one to bring one's life under the sway of God's redemption in Christ? Surely, it means that one's living is no longer simply his or her own. It means that one's daily activities are no longer controlled by Satan's dominion, but rather restricted by God's grace. When the Cross of Jesus is not the center of gravity for the believer, then, in due time, Christianity loses its moral and public energy. Either the Cross of Jesus is one's life or it is not. Christians are confronted on a daily basis to make a decision between two kingdoms—the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of humanity.

Christians need to replace the Cross of Christ as the center of their lives. In my (Dallas Burdette) fifty-five years of ministry, I have witnessed hundreds of individuals who have ceased to gather with the people of God—Sunday is no longer relevant to their way of thinking. The Church, or God's family, has little weight, or power, in their lives. They have lost their zeal, or fervor, for the business of God. Yet, in spite of one's failings, God's love is still a love that is undaunted by ingratitude, disobedience, and an unresponsive love. He is still standing as the heart's door requesting to come in. Christ's death set up a new relationship—a covenant between God and humanity, a covenant based on the Atonement of Christ. In the Atonement of Christ, one is confronted with God's act of redemption and with God's act of holiness.

One still witnesses the long-suffering and loving kindness of God as He continues to reach out to a people who have left their first love. It seems to this author that for those who have known God, there can be no final peace or joy apart from Him. Are you living your life apart from Christ? What does the church of Jesus mean to you? How do you react to the written Word of God? Is Sunday just another day—a day that has no relevance to the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus? Have you accepted Jesus as

Lord in your life? If so, don't forget that God makes His claim upon everyone who receives His Son as the Savior of the world. For one to be outside Jesus the Messiah is to be one who is devoid of hope. Outside Christ, one is conscious that individuals are under God's wrath. If the world of humanity is not under God's wrath, the Gospel of grace is deprived of its meaning. Even though many believers are slack in their service to God, God is still loving and patient. He wants everyone to repent and serve Him with zeal, with enthusiasm, with passion, and with gusto.

As one examines his or her own life, one can only know the true degradation of sin in all its horror and shame through the person of Christ Jesus upon the Cross. Just a brief glance toward the Cross of Jesus reveals the disgust and shame of sin's true colors. Christians are to live their lives with Christ as the very center of their lives. If one wishes to defeat the power of sin in one's life, this can only be done when Christ is enthroned in one's life. It is only in Christ that the influence of sin can be overpowered, or crushed. Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Or is God second in your life? Do you look to His kingdom now and the final blessed hope with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the eternal kingdom of God? Every Christian looks to the kingdom beyond this world and knows that the dissolution of death is not the final end, but rather it is the gateway to the glory of the eternal God. Are you insulting the Spirit of grace by your everyday life (**Hebrews 10:29**)? Why not read this entire chapter (Hebrews 10) for the context of how one insults the Spirit of grace! **READ! READ! READ!**

Again, one must ask himself or herself, what does life under the Cross of Christ mean to me? One can say that one's life under the Gospel is the opening of one's heart to Christ Jesus. Is Christ, first in your life? This opening of one's life to Christ enables one to bring forth fruits that result in God's glory. When one allows God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit the right of way in one's life, then this individual maintains consciousness of God's Good News that makes oneself available to be a channel that portrays His kingdom with a view of welcoming the fullness of God's glory. Again, what does the Church mean to you? What does it mean to assemble with the saints during the week? Unfortunately, many Christians abandon the assembling of themselves with other believers.

Yet, a life under the Gospel is a life that is active in the Church. Life in the Christian community is not only something between Christ and the individual, but it is also life in the Body of Christ. In other words, if one acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord in one's existence, this acknowledgement involves one's sharing his faith with others. To be a Christian means to be incorporated into the Body of Christ. The Church is the fellowship whereby the Gospel of God continues to be proclaimed throughout the world. Every individual is nourished through the Church. As one witnesses Christian baptism and the Lord's Supper, one is constantly reminded of one's life under the Gospel. Life in the Church is not isolationism. Christians should identify themselves with other believers.

Have you discarded the need for the Church in your way of life? One should never forget that the function of the internal life of the Church is to enable Christians to grow together in the Body of Christ. Jesus purchased the Church with His blood. The ultimate authority for the Church is found in the authority of God in His Revelation. Also, it is through the proclamation of the Good News of God that one discovers the function of the Church in society. Out of the Good News of God, one discovers the kingdom foretold by the prophets (**Daniel 2, Isaiah 2, Joel 2**). One can say that the

Gospel brought the Church into being and still keeps the Church in obedience to God. If the Church wishes to be a witness to the world, it must again and again search the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for those Scriptures that testify about Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. If the Church is unimportant, one wonders why the Holy Spirit wrote: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (**Acts 2:47**).

Devotional Studies No. 13

Triumphant Forgiveness Through Jesus

The phrase "forgiveness of sins" flashes like neon lights from the Cross of Jesus—"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (**Luke 23:34**). The words of Isaiah (739 BC) ring loud and clear as he foretells the coming of the Messiah and His mission: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (**Isaiah 53:5**). Daniel (605 BC), too, addresses the forgiveness of sins through God's Anointed One. He writes with pinpoint information: "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy" (**Daniel 9:26**). Zechariah (520 BC), too, wrote about this same time period when he spoke of the coming "Branch" that would "remove the sin of this land in a single day" (**Zechariah 3:9**). The "Branch" is the one that Jacob speaks of when he announces to his sons about the scepter departing from Judah (**Genesis 49:10**). He informed his children that this event would not take place "until he comes to whom it belongs" (**49:10b**). Haggai (520 BC) also speaks of the shaking of the political powers (scepter departing) of Judah. It was during this shaking of the nations that the "desired of all nations" would come (**Haggai 2:7**).

With the coming of the "desired of all nations," one hears the words of Jesus: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (**Matthew 26:28**). Because of Jesus' death upon the Cross, Paul writes to the believers in Colossae about forgiveness of sins through Christ. Prior to their conversion to Christ, they were dead in sins. In this short Epistle, Paul goes right to the heart of regeneration and its effects: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins" (**Colossians 2:13**). In dealing with forgiveness, Paul had to deal with the Law of God, which Law brings about condemnation. In order for God to extend forgiveness, He had to deal with His holy Law, which Law expresses disapproval of anyone who fails to adhere to perfection.

How did God forgive sins and not violate His Law? Paul explains: "having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (**2:14**). God took the I.O.U and nailed it to His Cross. He "canceled the written code," and He nailed "it to the cross." The KJV reads: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us." The "handwriting" is a list of charges against us. This "handwriting" represents a note signed by a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness. It is this note that God nailed to the Cross. God accomplished this feat through Christ. It is through Christ that one experiences this

new life. Prior to the new life, they were dead. In and through the work of Christ, God wipes away the sins of humanity. In this Epistle to the Colossians, Paul sets forth the amazing mercy of God. God's grace comes to humanity in and through Jesus. Even though believers are not under law, nevertheless, one must ask the question: how can anyone appropriate God's gift of redemption and, at the same time, live a life in defiance of God's grace? One must offer himself or herself to God. One's whole life is to be a life of service to God. In one's acceptance of God's grace, God sets one's feet in a new direction—a new path of life. In the new birth, one refashioned his or her heart so that one no longer points toward oneself but to God. Triumphant forgiveness through Christ demands a change from a self-seeking to a God-seeking life.

Those who accept Jesus as Lord in their lives experience justification by faith and justification from sin. In Jesus, one is set free from sin's guilt. When one accepts Jesus as God's Way of salvation, one passes from the reign of sin and enters the reign of righteousness. When one dies with Christ in baptism, one is set beyond the realm of God's Law; it can no longer condemn. In other words, the Law no longer rules—one now belongs to Jesus. When one participates in Christ's death through baptism, one is outside the pale of the Law's denunciation. Once one experiences God's grace of forgiveness, one must not live as if it never happened. When one is dead to sin, one lives for God. In the Ephesian Epistles, Paul calls attention to their condition prior to regeneration—"dead in your transgressions and sins" (**Ephesians 2:1**). Paul, in his Epistle to the Colossians writes: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (**Colossians 1:13-14**). This forgiveness in and through Christ is the subject of heaven (**Revelation 5:9-14**). In God's grace, He comes to humanity and allows humanity to come to Him. God's forgiveness is seen in His wonderful providence in that He accommodated Himself to our capacity—God became flesh. This grace is triumphant forgiveness through Christ.

Devotional Studies

Until Christ is Formed in You

Paul's words to the Galatians, "until Christ is formed in you" (**Galatians 4:19**), should penetrate the hearts of men and women as they examine their own lives to see if Christ is really formed in them. Is Christ, in actuality, reproduced in your life? Since Jesus is the Savior of the world, it is imperative for each individual to allow Christ to envelop the whole of his or her life. An understanding of the Christ event should cause every believer to yearn for Christ to be formed in one's life. The coming of Jesus into this sphere of world history is of decisive significance for all eternity. This fact of the richness of God's grace should remold one's external performance, or conduct.

The contrast between the world of unbelievers and the world of believers is vast. For the unbeliever, the world is swallowed up in the "nothingness" of death—beyond which there is no issue leading from the events of time into eternity. In other words, there is no difference between the death of a dog and the death of a human being. On the other hand, for the believer, eternity flows from Jesus. As one contemplates eternity, one is conscious that what happens in Christ is that which streams from eternity past to the present and to the future. Even before God spoke this universe into existence, God had already decreed redemption for His creatures; even though, in actuality, they had not yet been fashioned. Jesus who belongs to eternity is the only One who leads to eternity. Since this is true, one should ask himself or herself, is Christ formed within my own life? Is Christ truly "formed" in your life? If one truly reflects upon what it means to allow Christ to be shaped in one's lifestyle, one's walk with God will be a life that honors God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

For one to allow Christ to be fashioned in himself or herself, one must come to grips with the unique, once-for-all character and mission of Jesus. Even though the Christ event occurred two thousand years ago, nevertheless, this event represents the eternal world of God. God disclosed Himself through Jesus Christ. With the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, one's eternal destiny is based upon one's acceptance of the Son of God. Undoubtedly, some within the churches in the province of Galatia had not allowed Christ to be produced within themselves. In fact, Paul writes, so it seems, with anguish: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, [20] how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you" (**Galatians 4:19**)! The positive side to Christ's formation in the believer consists of the "fruit of the Spirit" listed in Chapter 6 of this book. Listen to Paul as he calls attention to the external behavior demanded of God: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (**5:22-24**).

Christians grieve the Holy Spirit when they do not allow Christ to be formed in their "newness of life." Again, Paul addresses this same topic to the Ephesians. Pay attention once more to Paul as he exclaims: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (**Ephesians 4:31-32**). Paul desires that the inner life of every believer come to life in the Lord Jesus. In other words, Christ has been given to believers in order that a transformation may come about in their lives. This new life in Christ is not intended to be just internal, but rather it is to be external. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, addresses the "outer" manners:

> You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (**Matthew 5:13-16**)

If individuals do not see Christ in individuals who profess faith in Christ, how can one expect to win others to Christ? Christ has been given not only to give eternal life, but also to bring about a renovation in one's life. For one to believe in Him without anything new coming to birth in his or her life is not biblical faith. Biblical faith means to become a "new creation" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). As long as one is worldly and self-willed, Christ cannot be formed within this saint. Every Christian is to be the "light of the world." If Christians wish Christ to be shaped in them, then they must give access to the Sprit of God who reduces one's ego and increases His fruit in the lives of His people. God's people must honor God more than they honor themselves. Every believer must bend beneath the yoke of Christ's humility. Do others see Christ in you? Remember, God invites humanity to share in His glorious kingdom through Jesus Christ. Paul's admonition to the Ephesians is an appeal to external behavior: "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (**Ephesians 4:1**). Is Christ formed in you?

Devotional Studies No. 25

Walking in Love

Christmas is a celebration about God's love for lost humanity. Do we love one another as God loves us? The words of John about God's love and our love for one another should ring loud and clear to all of God's people: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (**1John 4:10-11**). Christians talk about love, but, at the same time, it is difficult for many Christians to actually exhibit love in their lives, especially for the unlovable. The season of Advent, the birth of Christ, is a time in which Christians celebrate the coming of Christ into the world. One can hardly reflect upon this season without recalling the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (**John 3:16-17**). It is in this vein that Paul writes to the Romans: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). In the coming of Jesus, God reveals His unfathomable love.

Jesus, too, demonstrated His love by laying aside His glory and, at the same time, ransomed His life for many (**Philippians 2:6-8**). Paul prefaced his remarks about Jesus' glory with words that unfold the very essence of the Christian faith, which faith is overflowing with love:

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (**2:1-2**).

In the Advent of Christ, one witnesses the incomprehensible love of God and of Christ demonstrated in their search for that which they do not need. Immediately, upon the fall of Adam and Eve, God told Satan, in the presence of Adam and Eve, about the coming Redeemer. The whole of the Old Testament concerns the coming of Christ into the world. In the coming of Christ, one witnesses the One who truly loves. In the Advent of Christ, one observes the unveiling of Divine love in all its wealth and richness. As a result of this kind of love, Paul admonishes Christians to love one another with sincerity (**Romans 12:9**). It is not uncommon for Christians to love on the surface, but inwardly they are filled with disgust and hatred and revulsion and dislike for other believers,

especailly if they are not on their social status or do not think doctrinally as they think. For this reason, Paul zeros in on love for other believers, which love grows from an appreciation of God's love toward the ungodly, the wicked, the immoral, and the blasphemous individual. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says: "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? (**Matthew 5:46**).

Paul writes to the Ephesians that they should "walk in love" [περιπατεῖτε ἐν ἀγάπη, peripateite en agaph] (**Ephesians 5:2**). The NIV translates this phrase as, "live a life of love." Without love the body of Christ cannot live. Love, as it were, is the circulation of the blood in the body of Christ. Love is the outer expression for the hidden life in Christ. One must guard against clothing oneself with love just as an outer garment. Love must flow from the heart, internal as well as external. Paul concludes his First Epistle to the Corinthians with the following exhortation: "Do everything in love" (**1 Corinthians 16:14**). John writes: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another" (**1 John 3:11**). Again, John drives home the point of love:

> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. [15] Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. [16] This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. [17] If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? [18] Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. [19] This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence [20] whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. (**3:14-20**)

How do you feel about God's people? John goes right to the heart of the matter about love: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (**1 John 5:1**). The words of Jesus to His disciples should pierce each heart as one contemplates love: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (**John 13:34-35**). Do others know that you are a disciple of Jesus?

Devotional Studies No. 23

What Do You Think about the Christ

Are you committed to Christ? Does Christ make a difference in your life? What does the Incarnation of Christ mean to you? Are you conscious that in the Incarnation one sees the entrance of God into the sphere of humanity? When you look upon Christ, is the human "I" dethroned. The wonder of it all is that in Jesus, God broke through His own law in order to save fallen humanity. In other words, God broke through the curse of the law with His presence in and through Jesus the Messiah. It is through faith in Jesus that God meets humanity and, at the same time, allows humanity to meet Him. The eternal Son takes upon Himself human nature in order to redeem lost men and women. It is in and through Jesus that one knows God. As one contemplates upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, one is continuously reminded that God is love. He is the initiator of salvation, not men and women. This love is a love that seeks.

What does Christ mean to you? What do you think about the Christ? For almost two thousand years, men and women have searched for an answer to that question. In examining this controversy, one is confronted with various responses down through the centuries. Why is this question so important? One's eternal destiny depends upon a proper reaction to this discussion. Is He God or man? Did He preexist before becoming man? Is He eternal? These are questions that one must solve in seeking a solution to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he" (**Matthew 22:42**)? The apostles relentlessly preached Jesus Christ as the Savior of humanity. Remember, God comes to men and women through Jesus. Humanity does not find a way to God, but rather God comes to humanity in and through Jesus to offer salvation by grace through faith in Jesus the Christ. What do you think about the Christ?

Do you believe the following words of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (**John 1:1-2**). Was He really the Son of God? Did He leave heaven and come down to this world for a purpose? Did He come to seek and save the lost? A proper answer to these questions should assist one in making the correct reply to the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (**Matthew 22:42**). If one is not wrapped in wonder and struck with awe and impelled to bow in adoration of Jesus' love, one's faith is lodged only in one's mind. In other words, his or her faith has not penetrated into his or her heart. Is the preaching of Christ the message of inspiration in your life? Have you lost sight of the object and center of Jesus' message to a lost and dying world? Christ is the theme of the Old and New Testament writings. Have you accepted God's invitation to share in that glorious kingdom prophesied by the prophets of the Old Testament and announced in the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus?

If one considers anything and everything more important than Jesus Christ and His message of salvation, then one is on the wrong track? One of Jesus' disciples writes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (**John 1:1-2**). What does this Scripture mean to you? As one begins this quest for answers to the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees, one, too, may start with Luke's Gospel. Luke narrates some political history leading up to the birth of Jesus. This story is not legend; it is embedded in history. He informs Theophilus that Caesar Augustus had issued a decree for a census of the Roman world and that Quirinius was governor of Syria (**Luke 2:1-2**). He also fills in additional historical information about the events leading up to God becoming flesh. He composes the following account leading up to the birth of Jesus:

> Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (**Luke 2:4-7**)

How did John react to this birth? He goes right to the very heart of the matter: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (**John 1:14**). Matthew, as well, writes about the miraculous conception of Mary through the Holy Spirit (**Matthew 1:18**). In order to give weight, or authority, to the truthfulness of this assertion, he cites a prophecy of Isaiah (**7:14**) concerning the virgin birth of Jesus, a prediction made seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea—born not in a palace, but born in a manger. Jesus left the grandeur of heaven for a crown of thorns; He left the glory of heaven for a shameful death on a tree. The death and resurrection of Jesus fills the hearts of the early disciples in their proclamation about Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. Just a perusal of the New Testament books displays the focus of the disciples' preaching. For example, Paul, approximately twenty-five years after the crucifixion, captures in poetic language, as he drives home, the sacrifice of the One who became flesh.

> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (**Philippians 2:5-8**)

Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior? As one contemplates the uniqueness of Jesus, one is confronted daily with Jesus' question to the Pharisees about Himself: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (**Matthew 22:42**). What do you think about the Christ as a teacher? How do you react to His message about Himself as God's way of salvation? How do you react to His Sermon on the Mount? About three years earlier than this pinpointed question by Jesus, Matthew makes known how the people reacted to His Sermon on the Mount: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (**Matthew 7:28-29**). Do you stand in amazement and

admiration of the Sermon on the Mount?

Jesus delivered this Sermon after the imprisonment of John the Baptist (**Matthew 4:12**). Jesus then returned to Galilee and began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (**Matthew 4:17**). How did the people react to His message? Once more, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus, following the selecting of His disciples, "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (**Matthew 4:23**). The people responded overwhelmingly to Jesus' ministry (**4:23-25**). The miracles Jesus performed should increase everyone's faith in Jesus as the Son of God. On one occasion, Jesus said to the unbelievers: "Even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (**John 10:38**).

All over again, what does the Sermon on the Mount mean to you? Have you read the entire Book of Matthew recently? Matthew's book details many events that surround Jesus' teaching throughout Galilee. The most notable and outstanding of all the examples found in Matthew's writings is found in His Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**). After reading this Sermon, how do you respond to Jesus' question to the Pharisees? You know this Sermon, do you not? One cannot read this Sermon without standing in amazement, as did the people who heard Him. Christ's parables also dominate the scene of His public ministry. What about His parables? Do you remember any of His parables? Have you reflected recently upon His many parables? One of His most memorable parables, the Prodigal Son, is still reflected upon as one reflects upon God's forgiveness. Again, the question: What do you think of the Christ?

Devotional Studies

Your Spiritual Life: Zeal or Apathy?

Is there zeal for the things of God in your life? Or is there indifference toward spiritual things? Recently, I (Dallas Burdette) talked with an individual who informed me that he and his wife were not too much into this thing called "church." This barefaced, or blatant, remark shocks the believer. Yet, this same attitude is true of many who profess faith in Jesus, even though they do not verbalize this outlook. The Church is secondary in the lives of scores of Christians who confess Jesus as Lord. They are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (**2 Timothy 3:4**). They want to hold on to God with one hand and, at the same time, embrace the things of the world. God is placed on the back burner of one's life; lack of concern for spiritual matters is paramount. The words of Paul to Titus are as true today as they were then. Listen to Paul as he bemoans the feelings of many on the Isle of Crete: "They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him" (**Titus 1:16**). Paul, in his farewell letter to Timothy, lamented the desertion of Demas from his walk with the Lord. His words still confront the actions of many Christians today: "Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me" (**2 Timothy 4:10**). John, too, bewailed the trend of many when he wrote:

> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. [17] The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (**2 John 2:15-17**)

Moses is a classic example of one who chose God rather than the "pleasures of sin for a short time" (**Hebrews 11:24-25**). The author of Hebrews continues his remarks about Moses: "He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead for his reward" (**11:26**). Some pleasures are not sin, but, at the same time, one should not love the pleasures of life more that God. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, addresses the divided heart this way: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (**Matthew 6:24**). One could also say that one cannot serve both God and Pleasure. God and the things of His kingdom should be first in one's life. Again, Jesus says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (**6:32**).

It is time for self-examination. Have you examined your relationship to God recently? Paul, as he closes his second correspondence to the Corinthians, pleads with

them to "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course you fail the test?" (**2 Corinthians 13:5**). In Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, he praises Timothy with words that should be true of every believer: "I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interest, not those of Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 2:20-21**). Are you looking out for the things of God's kingdom? Everyone should have the mindset of the early Christians: "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (**Acts 2:42**). Are you devoted "to the fellowship" of God's people? Do you regularly meet with the saints on Sunday? Or do you forsake the assembly in order to enjoy the pleasures of life for a season? The early Christians, in spite of persecution on their door-steps, were told: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (**Hebrews 10:25**).

Countless Christians drift away because they do not stay in the Word. The caution of the author of Hebrews is still as applicable today as it was then: "We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (**2:1**). What is your custom about meeting with God's fellowship on Sundays? Have you adopted the custom of Jesus? Pay attention to Luke as he editorializes the habits of Jesus concerning the Sabbath: "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read" (**Luke 4:16**). Have you lost your spiritual fervor? Paul cautions Christians in Rome to "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (**Romans 12:11**). Have you lost your first love? To one of the seven churches of Asia, Jesus says, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (**Revelation 2:4**). Do you hold out the Word of Life? Do you shine like stars in the universe in your service to God? Since every individual believer lives in a depraved and crooked generation, he or she must, in the words of Paul to the Philippians: "shine like stars in the universe" as each believer holds out the word of life to a lost and dying world (**Philippians 2:16**).

Devotional Studies No. 9

Zeal for God's Redemption

Zeal for God's redemption is an enthusiasm for the initiative of the One true God who brought about redemption for lost humanity in and through His Son Jesus; Jesus is the window through whom one sees God. If one wishes to approach the Father of Light, this advancement toward God can only be done in and through Jesus. God's Eternal Being can only be seen in Christ. Christians rejoice daily in the Incarnation—the coming of the Son of God into the World. Even though Christ is the central message of the Gospel, nevertheless, the message of Christ reveals the Eternal God—the Father of the universe. The message of salvation is both Christocentric (Christ centered) and Theocentric (God centered). It is through Christ that God the Father is revealed. To see Christ is to see God. One knows the Eternal Son through the Incarnation—God manifested in the flesh. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (**John 1:14**). Jesus is the Mediator between God and man (**1 Timothy 2:5**). He is called the Mediator because of what He is in Himself—the God-Man. He is the revelation of God (**John 14:6-11**) and the salvation of humanity (**1 Timothy 1:15**).

As one contemplates the Incarnation, one is immediately aware that the Incarnation is the divine and merciful answer to humanity's falling away from God (**John 1:10-14**). Jesus is the Mediator of revelation and the Mediator of reconciliation (**14:6**). Recognizing Jesus as the Mediator breaks down self-righteousness on the part of men and women. The righteousness that justifies is the righteousness that belongs to God. This righteousness is something that is given, not earned. It is only by faith alone that one can know the Mediator as the Mediator. In faith, God strips one of all pretensions, or self-importance. One can only expect deliverance from condemnation through God's act of mercy in and through His Son. The word *faith* should cause one to stand in awe of God's wisdom in His scheme of redemption. Faith is the means of allowing oneself to be humbled and, at the same time, to approach God as one accepts the unspeakable mercy of God.

Remember, it is in Jesus the Mediator that one is able to accept, or receive, the mercy of God. Jesus stated that no one could come to the Father except through Him. It is only in His Person that one meets the Personal God. The Being of the Mediator (Jesus) is the gift and act of God (**John 3:16**). God is known through His action—the giving of His Son for redemption. God acts in the Incarnation of the Son of God. Having said this, one must never forget that this act of the Incarnation involved the whole Trinity. In Jesus, God has found a firm footing with humanity. The presence of God for humanity begins in Christ. Are we sharing the message of redemption with others? Do we share the Cross of Jesus with others for their salvation? It is in the Cross that God actually does something, an objective transaction, something that is absolutely necessary for salvation.

As one contemplates the Death of Christ, one is immediately aware that Christ's sacrifice is presented throughout the writings of Holy Scripture as a cosmic necessity—He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (**Ephesians 1:4**). This fact of God's love should create within every believer a desire to serve God with zeal. It is in this vein that Paul writes: "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (**Romans 12:11**). Again, Paul pens words of admonition about God's grace to Titus: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (**Titus 2:11-12**). If one wishes to maintain his or her zeal for the things of God, one should reflect upon the Cross of Jesus as the supreme demonstration of the depth and splendor of God's love to the world. Since the Kingdom of God is a sheer gift of grace, this should create within the hearts of men and women a zeal for God that cannot be quenched. In the preaching of the Cross, one is awakened to the reality that the Gospel of God brings men and women to God by bringing God to men and women. When one is forgiven in and through God's act of offering Jesus as an Atonement upon Calvary, one then has a new center of gravity.

Zeal for God comes when one realizes that the Cross is a place where one long road ends and another new road begins. If one wishes eternal life, this life can only be found in the One who gives eternal life. Death is inevitable! It is appointed unto men and women to die. Humanity is not only conscious of death, but that consciousness is his or hers alone. This consciousness does not belong to the animal kingdom, only to the kingdom of humanity. Death is the universal fact of all humanity; death claims the human race itself. Since in this life, no one has an abiding city, one should reach out to God with enthusiasm and eagerness for spiritual things. It is only the one who believes in God that wins the victory over despair and death. When one crosses the gulf that separates the present age with the age beyond, one is always aware that the present age ends with an event that is in itself the beginning of something new.

Death is the inevitable and only gateway to the eternal world of God. If one wishes zeal for God, one must live his or her life within the circle of ascended glory. Remember, the milk and honey is beyond the wilderness of this present age. For one to refuse zeal for God is to rebel against the Prince of human life. To rebel against God is the very meaning and measure of sin in all its ugliness. Are you resisting God? Does the fact that Jesus poured out His soul unto death for the sins of the world awaken within you a sense of awe and grandeur? The Divine initiative of God should create passion for spiritual things. This zeal, or eagerness, for God is possible for every individual who is confronted by eternity. How does one face eternity? It is the Gospel of God that gives hope to lost humanity. In the Gospel, God announces forgiveness.

Biblical Situation Ethics

Or

Graded Absolutism

When one reflects upon "situation ethics," one must distinguish between biblical situation ethics and humanist situation ethics. Is everything always "black" or "white"? Are there ever any gray areas? Is there such a thing as "graded absolutism"? In other words, do some laws take precedence over other laws? Is there ever a time in which mercy takes the lead over law? Can one be guilty of legalism in dealing with others? When two laws appear to conflict with one another, does the higher law take supremacy over the lower law? What does graded absolutism mean? These are questions that this paper seeks to deal with.

To begin this essay, it will be helpful to briefly observe two men of distinction who have addressed themselves to the subject of situation ethics without differentiating between biblical and humanist situation ethics. Dave Miller[1] and Bert Thompson[2] wrote articles about **Matthew 12:1-8** from which they drew certain conclusions about "situation ethics." Both men seek to preserve the Word of God as applicable to every area of one's life—and everyone must seek this same obedience. But in their analysis of **Matthew 12** and situation ethics, it appears that they are arguing against Joseph Fletcher's "situation ethics"[3] rather than biblical "situation ethics."

Everyone is a situational ethicist. Even Dave Miller and Bert Thompson cannot escape applying the principles of situational ethics to certain aspects of their own lives. All people make decisions upon the existential situation. The distinction between Fletcher's ethics and biblical ethics is as far apart as the East is from the West. Today, the phrase "situation ethics" does not communicate adequately the truths binding upon God's children. Since "situation ethics" convey negative overtones, perhaps another term may express more fittingly the truths contained in the Scriptures, namely, "graded absolutism."[4] This expression conveys more accurately the teachings of God for our society and culture. How one phrases certain truths or untruths often hinges upon cliches

employed to convey the truth or untruth intended. In other words, word groups can be very deceptive.

PHRASEOLOGY

In analyzing "situation ethics," it is necessary that one consider the appropriateness of certain expressions to express adequately the concept of biblical situation ethics. Since slogans or phrases are a part of our culture, one may attach good or sinister motives. Expressions may be good or bad depending upon the situation. Sayings communicate or describe thoughts or events. Cliches may be utilized to cover some clandestine operation—that is, some heinous, abhorrent, abominable, atrocious, inhuman, monstrous crime.

Gay Individuals

To illustrate the above paragraph, one only needs to reflect upon certain terms that no longer convey the same type imagery that it did just a few years ago. Presently one does not dare speak of an individual as "gay." Originally the word had a good connotation (implied meaning). For instance, a few years ago, when one spoke of a person as "gay," one simply meant that person was radiant, animated, and lively. But now, when an individual refers to a person as "gay," one has reference to his or her sexual preference; the word "gay" now identifies individuals that are homosexual, bisexual, or effeminate.[5] Even though this word "gay" is still an excellent word, nevertheless, this word must be used with caution.

Freedom of Choice

Another slogan that has a good ring is 'freedom of choice." There is nothing wrong in-and-of-itself concerning this idiom, but, on the other hand, the pro-abortionist advocates (those in favor of murdering the unborn) choose this cliché to advocate an individual's right to kill one's baby if she so desires—freedom of choice, so it is maintained, is everyone's right, so defends the pro-abortionist.[6]

Illegal Use of Words in Hitler's Germany

To cite another example, John S. Powell demonstrates forcefully the illegal use of words to cover sinister operations in Hitler's Germany.[7] He exhibits the ideas of "newspeak" as presented in Orwell's books ***1984***[8] and ***Animal Farm***.[9] Powell captures graphically the ideas of Orwell's depiction of the illegal use of phrases to cover-up one's terribly harmful motives. Powell tells of the "Killing Centers" that Hitler organized to exterminate the undesirables.[10] The amazing thing about Hitler's clandestine operation was the euphemistic terms he adopted to camouflage the exterminating centers.

One such organization established for the extermination of the sick and disabled, he called the "Realm's Work Committee of Institutions for Cure and Care."[11] Another establishment, devoted exclusively to the killing of children, was known by the name of "Realm's Committee for Scientific Approach to Severe Illness Due to Heredity and Constitution."[12] A third group, who processed questionnaires for these organizations,

was called the "Charitable Transport Company for the Sick."[13] Finally, another agency, which collected the cost of the killings from the families, was called the "Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care."[14]

The organizational names that Hitler gave to the "killing centers" were names that had a "good ring" to the concerned. But he misused the wording in the same way that Fletcher prostituted the expression "situation ethics." Since Fletcher has given an un-biblical connotation to this phrase,[15] then, one needs to choose a term that will more adequately express the teachings of God whenever he or she confronts a situation in which one must make a choice between two absolutes or between "mercy" or "law." When one makes a choice between two absolutes, this is known as "graded absolutism."[16]

The Scriptures provide many examples of "graded absolutism." Often the selection that an individual makes between two moral duties depends on the situation. In other words, the believer is exempt from his duty to the "lower law" by virtue of his obedience to the "higher law." It is not that the Christian does not believe in God's absolutes, but one believes that under certain conditions, some laws are "weightier"[17] than other laws (**Matthew 23:23**). Did not Jesus speak of the "least" and the "greatest"[18] commandments (**Matthew 5: 19**)?

SITUATION ETHICS

The above background concerning the improper utilization of expressions calls for further elaboration about the phrase "situation ethics." This designation in-and-of-itself is not bad terminology; but, like many other good sayings, it has received an ill-conceived connotation, that is to say, everything goes. In spite of its misuse, "Few positions are totally without any merit. There is usually enough truth in any false view to make it hold [some] water" writes Geisler.[19] At the moment, "situational ethics" is a theory of knowledge that does not believe that there are any moral absolutes by which man is to be governed.[20] To state more forcefully, the situationist believes that "man is the center of all things"; that is, man is his own God; he himself decides what is right and what is wrong. Man becomes his own God. Every Christian must reject this atheistic philosophy—a philosophy that is totally destructive to any society.[21]

It is necessary for every person to make a distinction between biblical situation ethics and humanistic situation ethics. In biblical situation ethics, one seeks to make application to various circumstances founded upon biblical principles, not simply that the "end justifies the means." To accomplish biblical situation ethics, one must search for terminology that will more adequately define or express God's standards. One such phrase is "graded absolutism." This designation expresses more accurately the idea of biblical situation ethics as expressed in the Bible. In other words, "graded absolutism" is simply the "person-in-the-situation" as taught in Holy Scripture.

GRADED ABSOLUTISM

In "graded absolutism," there are higher and lower moral laws.[22] In other words, not all moral laws are of equal weight. Jesus spoke, as mentioned above, of the "more

important matters of the law"[23] (**Matthew 23:23**) and of the "least" (**5:19**) and of the "great"[24] (**22:36**). From these three citations of Scripture, one observes that moral laws are hierarchically graded, that is, various levels in moral laws. Since there are different levels in moral laws, there may be times in which moral conflicts are unavoidable in which an individual cannot obey both commands of God simultaneously.

Every Christian is commanded to submit to God and to civil authorities. But what happens when these two powers come into conflict? There are times in which a Christian cannot conform to both at the same time. Seeking the proper solution to our dilemmas is not always the easiest thing to learn. Since everyone's knowledge is imperfect, one must not be dogmatic in his or her decisions. Geisler correctly states the difficulty:

> An absolutist often overstates one's case, acting as though one has an absolute understanding of absolutes. Antinomians [those without law] make a contribution to ethics by stressing the relative dimension. Finite man does not have an infinite understanding of the infinite. Paul said, "now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). The basic ethical principles are absolute, but our human perspective on them is less than absolute. In pointing to our changing understanding of God's unchanging moral law, antinomians have rendered an unwitting service to Christian ethics.[25]

GOD AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT

To explain by example the concept of "graded absolutism," consider the following biblical problem of two absolutes in conflict: (1) one's responsibility to obey government, and (2) to obey God. Paul says, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (**Romans 13:1**). This is the law of God; everyone must submit to government. But are there no exemptions to this absolute?[26] An example of the "exemption" concept is the tax laws of the US government. Often the government will make an "exemption" from the tax laws because of particular situations, but the law still stands. The United States government made exemptions for filing tax returns for the service men while in Saudi, Arabia; nevertheless, the tax law is still absolute in its intended meaning.

Christians are commanded by God to submit to governing authorities; this command from God is an absolute truth. But what does one do if the governing authorities demand compliance with things that are contrary to loyalty to God's commandments? In seeking a solution to the above dilemma, one must turn to the Scriptures for clarification. The Bible addresses itself to the concept of two absolutes coming into conflict with one another. For example, the case of Peter and John are called forth to enhance the dilemma of two supreme laws coming into friction. Peter and John were summoned before the Sanhedrin, who then "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"; but they answered, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (**Acts 4:18-19**). They faced a dilemma. What should be done in such a difficulty? Should they obey God or man? They obeyed the higher law, namely, submission to God; thus, the apostles resolved the conflict. Geisler correctly states, "God is the one absolute basis for all laws that reflect His nature, and each

law is absolutely binding on the particular activity it governs."[27]

TRUTH TELLING VERSUS FALSE TELLING

Rahab the Harlot

To cite another case dealing with biblical situation ethics, one should reflect upon Rahab's "false telling" versus "truth telling," which stands as a classic. What should she have done? Should she have practiced deception to save the spies? What was right? What was wrong? What would you have done? Should one always tell the truth despite circumstances? Hasn't everyone been confronted with the dilemma of when to tell or when not to tell the truth? Are there ever any "exemptions" to the command not to tell falsehoods? Does God withhold accountability from the person who demonstrates mercy to the innocent rather than truth telling to the guilty? What does the Word of God assert concerning mercy to the innocent instead of "truth telling" to the guilty?

Before one seeks an answer to Rahab's predicament, one should observe what God has said about fabrication. God, through Moses, commanded that one "shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (**Exodus 20:16**). Paul also writes that one "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (**Ephesians 4:25**). Again, Solomon says that "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful" (**Proverbs 12:22**). Now, on the other hand, the Bible records circumstances in which lying was practiced in order to save lives. Were the above Scriptures violated in the actions of Rahab? Can one deceive and still be innocent? Rahab is one such person who exhibited "mercy showing" rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Rahab hid the spies, who were involved in espionage, from Israel's enemies and then lied to save their lives (**Joshua 2:1-7**). Did she sin? Did she apply in principle biblical law and truth to the situation? Was she mixed up in "situation ethics"? It seems that God withheld accountability and rewarded her for her "mercy showing" to the people of God rather than "truth telling" to God's enemies. She practiced what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not considering—"I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (**Matthew 12:7**).

In spite of her deception, God immortalized her in the Book of Hebrew's "Hall of Fame (**Hebrews 11:31**). Nowhere does the Bible condemn her for her actions. In fact she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (**Matthew 1:5**). Her performance was an integral part mercy,[28] which God was pleased with; God is a God of mercy.[29] In evaluating her difficulty, one must weigh the totality of God's Word. Everyone should reflect upon the words of the prophet Micah in his admonition to the children of Israel: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (**Micah 6:8**). Again, everyone should reflect upon the words of Jesus to the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (**Matthew 12:7**).

Since God desires mercy more than sacrifice, then, it should not be surprising to any that mercy takes the lead over law. This revelation of God's kindness should come as a relief to all. For one to comprehend the implications of "truth telling" versus "false telling" and the superiority of one absolute over another absolute, one only needs to read the story of Corrie Ten Boom who lied to the Nazis to save the lives of Jews. Her

deceptions were not evil, but good. Parallels are present between the "then" (Rahab) and the "now" (Corrie Ten Boom).

The Hebrew Midwives

Another first-class illustration of circumstances determining the direction one should follow is the Hebrew narrative about the Hebrew midwives' deception to Pharaoh. Moses chronicles this narrative in his second book of the Pentateuch:

> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, **"When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.** Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So **God was kind to the midwives** and the people increased and became even more numerous (**Exodus 1:15-20**).

This is another instance of God withholding accountability from individuals who demonstrate "mercy" to the innocent rather that "truth telling" to the guilty. As cited above, Jesus forcefully set forth this truth when he cites the Older Testament along with his comments: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (**Matthew 12:7**).

God's absolute about falsehood still stands—"Truth telling" and "mercy showing" are both grounded in God's nature. In God there are no conflicts between these two attributes—"mercy showing" and "truth telling." But with men there is often conflict between the two. The problem man faces is that occasionally he cannot perform both simultaneously. But, on the other hand, God, in such cases, withholds accountability from the person who demonstrates "mercy" to the innocent rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Geisler goes right to the heart of the matter in his observation concerning lying in preference to "truth telling" versus "mercy showing" when he writes:

> Some would prefer calling this not a "lie" but an "intentional falsification." Call it what we will, it does not change the fact that it would be morally wrong—unless, of course, one is obeying a higher moral law in so doing. I prefer calling it a "lie" so that it is clearly understood that lying as such (without a higher conflicting law) is wrong.[30]

The three examples presented above about (1) "God and Government," (2) "Rahab and the Spies," and the (3) "Hebrew Midwives" illustrate that some absolutes are higher than other absolutes. There are graded levels of moral commands in Scripture. Not all moral laws are of equal weight (Matthew 23:23[31]; 5:19[32]). One must never forget that there may be occasions in which mercy takes priority over law. The Christian has a moral obligation to search the Scriptures in every conflicting situation. Every text must be set in conversation with the whole Bible. Leroy Garrett captures the essence of the "greatest" versus the "least" in his essay, "What I Believe About Situation Ethics."

> Most, if not all, moral problems are solved in part by a reference to it all depends, i.e., it all depends on the situation. Is it right to deceive? Is it right to drive in excess of the speed limit? Is it right to break into your neighbor's house? . . . . it is the person in the situation that makes the difference, which means that the view I am defending might better be called "Person-in-the-situation" ethics . . . There is in moral thought a concept known as the "principle of necessity," which says that if it is necessary to act contrary to laws that one would ordinarily honor in order to help someone in an emergency situation, then "what is necessary" takes precedence over law.[33]

"What is necessary" often requires one law taking precedence over another law or, to state another way, mercy often takes priority over another known absolute. Remember that laws are made for man's well-being, not man for law. Again, one should recall Jesus' philosophy of "mercy" taking precedence over "law" in his confrontation with the religious leaders who practiced law over mercy. Mark adds additional information to this episode in which Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their lack of mercy:

> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath**. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (**Mark 2:23-28**).

What is the difference between the humanistic situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher and the biblical situation ethics of Christians? With Fletcher the circumstances determine what is right or wrong.[34] On the other hand, the Christian does not allow the situation to decide what is right or wrong, but, rather, he or she simply allows the situation to assist one in discovering which moral law applies in a difficulty. One must look at the facts and then determine which law of God should be obeyed—or mercy extended. No one should be guilty of: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (**Matthew 22:29**).

Geisler is on target when he says, "graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one."[35] He makes a distinction between the situation ethics of the Bible (graded absolutism) and the situation ethics (antinomianism—without law) of Fletcher.[36] Geisler says,

> Fletcher believes that the situation determines what one should do in a given case; graded absolutism holds that situational factors only help one to discover what God has determined that we should do. That is, the situation does not fill an empty absolute with content and thereby determine what one would do. Rather, the situational factors merely help one discover which command of God is applicable to that particular case . . . . It is true that occasionally the conclusions are the same, but they are based on very different reasons. Hence, the similarities are only accidental and not essential. Fletcher concludes

> something is right or wrong because the "existential particularities" of the situation determine it; graded absolutism, on the other hand, concludes something is right or wrong because God has declared it.[37]

MATTHEW 12: GRADED ABSOLUTISM

Jesus sets biblical situational ethics, or graded absolutism, forth in His encounter with the Pharisees.

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (**Matthew 12:1-8**).

Since **Matthew 12** is called forth as testimony to represent biblical "situation ethics," or "graded absolutism," then, it is essential that one carefully analyze this pericope (section). Does this segment of Scripture teach "graded absolutism"? In seeking an answer, one must not confuse the teachings of Fletcher with the teachings of Christ. "Situation ethics" based upon the philosophy of Fletcher must be rejected—it is anti-God. But if one's idea of ethics is not humanistic in origin but biblical in origin, then, there is no reason to deny the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Some Christians think such a position changes God's law for the sake of convenience.

Dave Miller, as cited above, complains about the position many Christians take concerning biblical situation ethics. He apparently does not consider an alternative phrase to express the truths of God more accurately for our culture. Miller asserts:

> A favorite "proof test" of the situation ethicist and, increasingly, of the libertine within the church, is the incident recorded in Matthew 12:1-9. . . . Some have suggested this passage teaches that times arise within the Christian's life when he must break the "letter of the law" to keep the "spirit of the law." They maintain that Jesus permits us to violate His will at times for the sake of convenience. If compliance with His words becomes inconvenient, then those words may be treated as optional. . . . . For them, right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex. What is wrong in one situation may be right and acceptable in another. [38]

It is obvious that Miller overstates his case; he also accuses, without evidence, other believers of manipulation of the law of God to justify one's own selfish ends. In other words, Miller charges other Christians with blatant disregard for God's Word by saying, "if I do not like what God said, then, I will violate the law to accomplish my desired ends so that I am obeying the 'spirit of the law.'" Is this the philosophy of believers? I think not! Christians do not, and must not, advocate the breaking of God's

law "for the sake of convenience." He makes this assertion, without facts to substantiate his allegations, against other believers who rely upon Jesus' teachings in **Matthew 12** to draw conclusions that differ with his. These Christians are not guilty of saying, as Miller does, "right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex." He exaggerates his concern.

THE HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FROM THEN TO NOW

An interpreter is often confronted with the hermeneutical question of how to relate the circumstances in life to the situational ethics in the Bible—from ***then*** to ***now***. It is obvious that every interpreter must make the hermeneutical jump from the ***then*** of the Scriptures to the ***now*** of the present. This jump must be made on the analogy of Scripture, that is to say, by the principles set forth by the Holy Spirit, not man's ingenuity to violate Scripture as did the Pharisees (**Matthew 15:1-13**). This in-built process of clarification and correction of one's interpretation is accomplished through apparent analogies and similarities. As one reads the book of Matthew, one discovers broad principles set forth to assist one in his or her interpretation of difficult situations.

An exploration of Matthew's description of Christ's confrontation with the religious leaders is most helpful in seeking biblical answers to friction (see **Matthew 12:1-8**). For one to be "biblical" in applying the principles set forth by Jesus does not mean that one has to create the same conflicts in order to give the same answers. To illustrate the above principle of "situational ethics," five additional subjects will be explored to demonstrate the principles set forth by Jesus in **Matthew 12**:

- monetary assistance to unbelievers
- assistance to someone in need on Sunday
- divorce for other causes than adultery
- observance of the Passover at a different time frame than authorized by God
- two brothers who violate God's law, but not condemned.

Monetary Assistance to Unbelievers

Paul encouraged the Galatians to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (**Galatians 6:10**). This is a case for "situation ethics." If one can help only one family or individual—one family belongs to God and the other does not—what criteria must be exercised in determining one's judgment? This decision presents a predicament for the believer; he or she must choose one or the other. How does one resolve the problem? In this case, the situation resolves the outcome. The believer makes judgment upon the circumstances—everyone is a situational ethicist, whether one likes it or not! This illustration may be somewhat overly simplified. To illustrate, let everyone think about some uncertainties that are more convoluted in nature. The next issue is a little more intricate in nature, but not extremely so. Nevertheless, assistance to someone in need on Sunday may take precedence over the instructions not to abandon the assembly (**Hebrews 10:25**).

Sunday Morning Assembly

If one is on his or her way to the assembly on Sunday morning to meet with the saints and comes across a very bad automobile accident, what action should be taken by the believer? Should he or she continue the journey to the Sunday morning assembly or

should one give assistance rather than continue on the journey so that one does not violate the command to meet?[39] If one chooses to place a human being above the Sunday service because of the circumstances, then, this conduct is grounded on situational ethics. In this scenario, the qualifying factors regulate one's deeds. Is this biblical? Is this action based upon situational ethics? To return to the story of David (**1 Samuel 21:1-6; Matthew 12:1-8**), one recalls that David's situation resulted in extreme hunger for himself and his men; but his hunger and need took priority over sacred ritual. David's incidence is the ***then*** and the automobile accident is the ***now.***

Divorce for Other Causes than Adultery

Should one ever apply the righteousness of mercy to an individual caught in a marriage that is "hell on earth"? Should one have to stay in a marriage in which the husband physically abuses the wife and children? Can one draw principles from the story of David in **Matthew 12** to the subject of divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality? It appears, so it seems, that a close scrutiny of some marriages demand that the standard of mercy takes precedence over law. Is it possible that the state of affairs is the determining factor in deciding whether or not one can divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality?

The question of divorce is a puzzling uncertainty to many Christians. Even though divorce is a very perplexing predicament, one still needs to come out of the closet and deal with the problems that people face daily—the *now*. There are no "pat answers" to all of the problems that people face in every day life that is beyond their control. Everyone should be realistic in his or her approach to divorce. The "nuts and bolts" of life must be dealt with. The topic of divorce and remarriage is much more complex than we wish to admit. There are no "pat answers." Since sin is a part of the society, one must seek answers for solutions to the divorce dilemma from principles set forth in Holy Scripture.

Can you conceive of any circumstance in which divorce would be acceptable to God without sexual immorality on the part of one of the partners? Do you say no? Did Jesus intend to teach that there are no grounds for divorce other than fornication or adultery? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings of Jesus, did they have in view that His words were a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? What about wife abuse, husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, murder, armed robbery, etc. Are these justifiable reasons for divorce? These are issues that need to be answered! Perhaps, a biblical concept of situational ethics or graded absolutism will help to determine the proper course of action. Is there any justification for applying the principle of mercy over law as set forth by Jesus in His confrontation with the religious leaders (**Matthew 12:1-8**)?

It is easy for one to answer emphatically—"no other cause than fornication."[40] For many, if one is the victim of ill-treatment or extreme brutality that is still not biblical cause for divorce. In seeking answers to many complex issues, everyone must rely upon God's revelation in its totality, not just proof-texting. One must rely upon God's Word, the standard by which all things must be judged, in judging the principles of right and wrong. When one limits divorce only to sexual immorality, one creates impossible situations for the innocent victim.

To set the stage for the principle of "mercy" over "law," this author presents two stories about murder and wife abuse. These two stories illustrate the "person-in-the-situation" in order to focus upon the words of Jesus in **Matthew 12.** These two accounts are about trauma two women experienced with their husbands who were involved in some

"unclean thing."[41] These two dilemmas should shock everyone into the reality of the heinousness of sin in this depraved world and the dilemma these two women found themselves in .

CASE NUMBER ONE. According to a police report, two men (Grady Gibson and Eddie Hart) conspired to kill the wife of Eddie to collect insurance money. This young woman was taken out into the woods, tied to a tree, and almost decapitated by Grady Gibson. He did not have sex with her, he simply cut off her head. Both men, after two years of investigation by the Montgomery Police Department, were convicted of murder. The husband, Eddie Hart, of the dead woman, received a sentence of fifty years; but the other man received life without parole. He is in for life! Now, the question: Is Mrs. Gibson bound to her husband, Grady Gibson, for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sex with the woman he murdered—he just cut her head off? Does she have scriptural grounds to divorce him and remarry, even though adultery was not committed? Some say yes, others say no.

Since Mrs. Gibson's husband is incarcerated in prison for life, without a chance for parole, What is her situation in regards to divorce and remarriage? Is she bound to him for life since he did not pull off her panties and have sex with her? To begin with, Mrs. Gibson did file a motion (July 7, 1988) with the Circuit Court in Montgomery Alabama for a new trial on behalf of her husband, a former Alabama Bureau Investigation agent for the police department of Montgomery, Alabama. However, later, she eventually divorced her husband—who is imprisoned for the rest of his life. Now the question: What is the status of the wife since the husband did not commit adultery, but murder? Since she divorced her husband, is she free to marry again? Is she bound to this man for the rest of his life? Are there any principles set forth in the Scriptures whereupon one can make a rational decision concerning her predicament? Can she remarry without sinning? One also wonders what woman in her right mind would want to go back to such a brute, even if he were released from prison.

CASE NUMBER TWO. On April 20, 1988, the Montgomery Advertiser published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." This woman testified that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." She also stated that her husband "threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian roulette. His gun, my head." Now the question is: Does God forbid this woman to divorce her husband who is brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, and violent? Does God forbid her divorce since sexual immorality was not involved? Can she divorce him and remarry without sinning if fornication was not involved? Would you say, "bound for life, adultery not committed!" Are there no mitigating circumstances where mercy takes precedence over law? Would Matthew 12 apply in this case? Is this a "now" situation?

David and the Bread of the Presence

Frequently, Christians are treated with the same legality that the religious leaders bound upon the people in the days of Christ (**Matthew 5:21-48**). Those leaders used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions (**Matthew 15:1-13**), as do many Christians today. This same unconcern for the well being of the person is still practiced by many leaders today, especially elders and preachers, to bring persons into conformity with their demands or face the consequences of excommunication from the so-called faithful brethren. Fred Craddock correctly states the problem:

> This problem is as old as the church, for there has always been a tradition preserved in sacred texts with all the uses and misuses that accompany Scripture. Jesus frequently faced the problem of being charged with flying in the face of Scripture.[42]

As mentioned above, Matthew records a confrontation of the Pharisees with Jesus (**Matthew 12:1-12**), in which Jesus reminds the leaders that David and his companions violated God's law concerning the eating of the "Bread of the Presence," but Jesus indicates, according to the conversation, that they were innocent (without guilt). In this particular case of hunger, Jesus informed the leaders that "mercy" took precedence over "law." In the course of this encounter, Jesus also explained this principle of "mercy" by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus corrected their theology by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (**Mark 2:27**). In other words, Jesus is simply saying that under normal circumstances one would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over law.

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (**1 Samuel 21:1-6**) and the apparent, not real, infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions one did that which was forbidden by God and the other forbidden by the religious leaders. Jesus did not directly address the leaders' accusation against the disciples, but, rather, stood with the Pharisees on their own ground and assumed for the sake of argument that the disciples profaned the Sabbath. Jesus reasoned that since it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life on the Sabbath, then, both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the law (see **Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6**).[43]

The same principle that Jesus set forth in this confrontation with the religious leaders may be applied to other commands of God. To apply the same logic about "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" to **Matthew 5:32** is appropriate. To illustrate this point still further, neither man nor woman was made for the marriage law, but the marriage law was made for their benefit. In other words, there may be mitigating circumstances, as discussed above, wherein "mercy" takes seniority over "law." Larry Richards' statement about the principle of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of law. David and the priest broke the law but were adjudged innocent. Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage indicate that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities. . . . *It is here (Mt 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will (Italics mine*—RDB).[44]

Hezekiah and the Passover

God ordained that the Passover be observed on the 14th day of the first month of Nisan (**Numbers 9:5**). But there were those who could not meet this requirement because of extenuating conditions beyond their control. Thus God gave an "exemption" to this regulation (**9:6-7**), and, as a result, God informed the Israelites that the feast could be observed on the following month on the fourteenth (**9:8-12**). These extenuating circumstances created an "exemption," not an "exception," to the normal procedure. This incident of Hezekiah and the Passover is an excellent illustration of biblical situational ethics. The people-in-the-situation made the difference.

According to the Chronicler (**2 Chronicles 30:2-5, 18-27**), Hezekiah, king of Israel, decided to celebrate the Passover "contrary to what was written" (**30:18**). Hezekiah discovered that the Passover "had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written" (**30:5**). Even though he had no direct word from the Lord, nevertheless, Hezekiah ordered the priest to slaughter the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month (**30:15**). Even though many "were not ceremonially clean (**30:17**), still, he prayed for everyone who set his heart on seeking God:

> Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of his fathers—**even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary**." And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people (**30:18-20**).

Is this not another example of biblical situational ethics? Because of mitigating factors, God made an "exemption" to His law.

Two Brothers: Eleazar and Ithamar

Who were these two brothers? They were the sons of Aaron and the brothers of Nadab and Abihu. Eleazar and Ithamar witnessed the death of their two brothers (**Leviticus 10**). Why were they killed? Moses informs us that they disobeyed God and were destroyed. On the other hand, these other two brothers disobeyed God, but they were not destroyed. Why were they spared? Did the heart have anything to do with the two sets of brothers? Did the heart play a part in God's reaction to the four brothers in His dispensing of judgment? Were Nadab and Abihu involved in high-handed rebellion against God's commandment? Were the actions of Eleazar and Ithamar also high-hand rebellion against God's commandment? It appears from the context of **Leviticus 10** that their actions had to do with their mental state as a result of their having just witnessed the death of their two brothers.

Moses writes that Eleazar and Ithamar *burnt* the "sin offering" rather than *eat* the "sin offering" as commanded by God. To begin with, Moses was highly incensed at their actions. Moses writing in the third person says,

> When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by

making atonement for them before the LORD. Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded." Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the LORD have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" When Moses heard this, he was satisfied (**Leviticus 10:16-20**).

Is this biblical situational ethics? Did God exonerate their course of action because of controlling factors? Did the "situation" make the difference in God's reaction to a violation of His law?

CONCLUSION

Did Jesus teach "graded absolutism" or the principle of "mercy" over law? Did Jesus illustrate this righteousness of "leniency" in His dispute with the religious leaders in **Matthew 12**? Jesus says that it always lawful to do good and to save life. Jesus illustrates the principle of "to do good" and "to save life" with the example of David and the "Bread of the Presence" that mercy took priority over law. In other words, law gave way to mercy.

Jesus conceded that His disciples broke the *rabbinical rules* about the Sabbath, and, then, He used this episode as a basis to call attention to the principle of mercy. Jesus presented the case of David in order to call attention to the principle of kindness, even with a known violation of the law. Even though David and his men disregarded the law of God, nevertheless, they were guiltless. Again, one witnesses the standard of mercy overriding law. Jesus develops this concept of compassion by saying, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (**Matthew 12:7-8**). Even if the disciples had broken the Sabbath, the necessities for life (food) would have overridden law.

Is there not a grave responsibility upon everyone to look at variations dictated by concrete situations in the lives of people before rendering a decision of condemnation? It is before the judgment of God that everyone is responsible for his or her good-treatment or ill treatment toward God's people. When Christians fail in honoring an individual's precarious situation in life, there is no lasting worth to what they are doing. The vocation of every Christian should be renewed commitment to the triune God; a renewed commitment to the words of Scriptures handed down by the Holy Spirit to assist everyone in loving and serving Him, the Creator of heaven and earth. May God help every believer to practice the words of Paul to the Romans.

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand (**Romans 14:4**).
Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat (**Romans 14:10**).
We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.
3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement

of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God** (**Romans 15:1-7**).

The principle of mercy over law and the idea of the "weightier" matters of the law are still valid perceptions that need examination in dealing with conflicts in the lives of men and women. Everyone must deal with the *then* and the *now*.

APPENDIX: CITATION OF SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 58: 6-7	**Luke 6:6-11**
"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?	On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Luke 13:10-17	**Luke 14:1-6**
On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she	One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. 5 Then he

straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.	asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they had nothing to say.

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[1] See Dave Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," ***Firm Foundation*** 105 (December, 1988): 1, 6

[2] See Bert Thompson, "Did Jesus Teach Situation Ethics?," ***The Spiritual Sword*** 45, no. 3 (April 1991): 3-6.

[3] See Joseph Fletcher: ***Situation Ethics: The New Morality*** (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966). For an excellent analysis of Flethcher's' Situation Ethics, see Joseph Fletcher and John Warwick Montgomery, ***Situation Ethics*** (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Dimension Books, 1972). This book is a transcript of a public dialogue between Professor Joseph Fletcher and Dr. John Warwick Montgomery.

[4] Graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. It is the pyramid of values in accordance with God's own nature. Each particular command of God is absolute in its own sphere. There is a hierarchy of laws within God's kingdom.

[5] John Ayto, ***Dictionary of Word Origins*** (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 251, writes: "The 2oth-century sense 'homosexual,' which first came into general usage in the 1950s, seems to have arisen from an earlier American slang term *gay cat*, which originally denoted a young male tramp who was the companion of an older tramp. The implications of a homosexual relationship which this carried had led by the 1930s to the use of *gay cat* for any young male homosexual, and the application of *gay* to 'homosexual'

was probably generalized from this."

[6] See Jean Staker Garton, ***Who Broke the Baby?*** (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1979), 13-19 for an excellent treatment of "Seduction by Semantics."

[7] See John S. Powell, ***Abortion: The Silent Holocaust*** (Texas: Argus Communications, 1981).

[8] See George Orwell, ***1984*** (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

[9] See George Orwell, ***Animal Farm*** (New York: New American Library, 1946).

[10] Powell, ***Abortion: The Silent Holocaust***, 30-39.

[11] Ibid., 31.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 32.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Fletcher, ***Situation Ethics***, 120: "Only the end justifies the means; nothing else."

[16] Graded absolutism, unlike situation ethics, does not approve of wife-swapping, adultery to get out of prison, blasphemy, abortion of unwanted babies, harlotry to teach maturity, nor premarital intercourse.

[17] KJV

[18] KJV

[19] Norman Geisler, ***Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 34.

[20] Fletcher, ***Situation Ethics***, 120-133.

[21] For a thorough investigation and analysis of this philosophy ("man is the center of all things"), I recommend Norman L. Geisler, ***Is Man the Measure?: An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism*** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

[22] I am indebted for much of this discussion to Geisler, ***Christian Ethics***, 113-132.

[23] The KJV renders this as: "weightier *matters* of the law." All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

[24] The KJV renders this as: "greatest commandment."

[25] Geisler, ***Christian Ethics***, 35.

[26] In using "exemption" rather than "exception," one seeks to maintain the absoluteness of the law. See Geisler, ***Christian Ethics,*** 110 for an excellent examination of this distinction.

[27] Ibid., 95.

[28] See Jesus' illustrations concerning "mercy" taking precedence over "law," in **Matthew 12:1-8**. Even though Jesus did not address Rahab in His confrontation with the religious leaders, nevertheless, there is still the same principle of mercy taking precedence over law.

[29] Jonah's conversation with God is an excellent example of God's mercy: "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity (**Jonah 4:1-3**).

[30] Norman Geisler, ***Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*** (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 91

[31] "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

[32] "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

[33] Leroy Garrett, "What I Believe About Situation Ethics," ***Restoration Review***, vol. 12, no. 10 (December 1988), 150-51.

[34] Fletcher, ***Situation Ethics***, 134-45.

[35] Geisler, ***Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics***, 93.

[36] Geisler prefers the expression "graded absolutism" to "situation ethics" because of its current usage—everything goes. The expression "situation ethics" today

represents a philosophy that is anti-God. In other words, a belief that there are no absolutes, everything is relative. For example, there is no such thing as right and wrong, that is to say, good or evil.

[37] Geisler, ***Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics***, 93.

[38] Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," 6.

[39] I am granting the traditional interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 that teaches one cannot miss an assembly on Sunday morning. Although this Scripture is relied upon by many Christians to teach that one must not skip a Sunday morning service, still it must be brought to the attention of the reader that this verse does not teach that interpretation. This Scripture teaches that one must not abandon, give up, or toss aside.

[40] For a more detailed discussion of divorce and remarriage, see Dallas Burdette, "Divorce and Remarriage," ***Ensign*** 19, no. 1 (January 1991: 17-20; also ***Ensign*** 19, no. 2 (February 1991): 27-31.

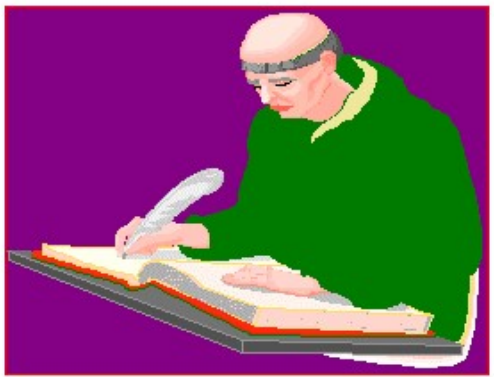
[41] See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

[42] Fred B. Craddock, ***As One Without Authority*** (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 119.

[43] See Appendix for Scripture citations in full.

[44] Lawrence O. Richards, ***Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

The Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline Accounts



Thrust statement: **Every Christian should diligently search for the meaning of the text.**

Scripture readings: **Matthew 5:31-32; 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:15**[1]

> Without discussing immediately the correctness or incorrectness of these interpretations, it may be profitable to consider the danger of approaching the Scriptures with preconceived ideas on what a text can or cannot say. Regardless of which interpretation is correct, it is frightening that the meaning of the text no longer serves as a final authority. On the contrary, it is the present theology that predetermines what the text means and that serves as a final authority![2]

The "divorce sayings" in the Synoptic Gospels and the teachings of Paul are interpreted with a diversity of explanations. Each interpreter assumes that his clarification of the divorce sayings is God given; therefore, there is no room for disagreement once a pronouncement is made. A perusal of the various journals, especially Church of Christ journals, reveals that the most able and accomplished preachers differ widely in their explanations of the "bill of divorcement" statements. Christians differ widely in their understanding of the subject of divorce and remarriage. Many believers have allowed their discernment about the terminating of a marriage to fracture the fellowship of believers; they make no room for differences—one must agree with the interpreters or suffer the consequences.

God's family struggles daily over how one is to interpret the divorce remarks when confronted with mitigating situations surrounding depraved behavior or circumstances, which alters one's station in life. For example, have you ever considered the predicament of someone whose spouse has committed murder? How should one react to physical abuse by his or her spouse? Does God demand that an individual stay married to someone who is confined to prison for the rest of his or her life because of some degenerate action committed by the spouse imprisoned? Does God command an individual to live with someone who is "hell" on earth? If someone is guilty of murder, not sexual immorality, is the other partner committed to the murderer for the rest of his or her life? One does not always know what course of action to pursue when one confronts uncontrollable surroundings beyond his or her control.

Since divorce and remarriage are prevalent in every society, as it was also in Jesus' society, it is incumbent upon every Christian to seek answers from principles set forth in Holy Scripture in trying to ferret out the intricate problems men and women face daily concerning the dilemma of divorce and remarriage. In pursuit of correct answers about how to react in all surroundings, one soon discovers that there are no "pat" answers. This essay pursues two avenues of thought to cope with the problem of divorce and remarriage: (1) exaggeration in the divorce sayings, and (2) the principle of mercy over law.

EXAGGERATION

Divorce is not always obtained on the basis of "sexual immorality." Does this always violate the divorce sayings in the synoptic gospels and Pauline writings? Are there any valid reasons for divorce other than "fornication"? Did Jesus teach that there are no *exemptions* to the marriage bond other than "fornication" or "adultery"? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings, did they consider the pronouncements of Jesus a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? Did Jesus contemplate wife abuse,[3] husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, and withholding of conjugal rights? In Jesus' response to the Pharisees in **Matthew 19:1-12,** did Jesus have in mind such crimes as murder and armed robbery? Did He contemplate these atrocities in His Sermon on the Mount when He discussed the teachings of the Pharisees and Scribes about divorce and remarriage (**Matthew 5:31-32**)? Are these hypothetical cases? Or are these circumstances that need review in making a judgment about the innocent party?

Are these acts of violence included in the word "fornication"? Or did Jesus exclude every crime except "sexual immorality"? Or were these words of Jesus simply "overstatement" or "exaggeration" to emphasize the original intent of God? These are questions that require response. When one limits divorce and remarriage to "sexual immorality," one often creates impossible situations for individuals who suffer from circumstances beyond their control. For example, consider the following trauma two

women experienced in their marital relationships. One of the husbands was involved in a very heinous murder and the other husband was deeply involved in wife abuse of great degradation.

CASE NUMBER ONE. The following is a brief scenario of two men who conspired to kill the wife of one of them. According to a police report, Grady Gibson and Eddie Hart combined forces to kill Eddie's wife to collect insurance money ($100,000). Eddie (the murdered woman's husband) and Grady collected the money, but their clandestine operation was not discovered until almost two years after the killing—both men were eventually brought to trial. One of the men, Grady, who almost decapitated Eddie's wife, received life without parole for his part in the homicide. On the other hand, Eddie, the dead woman's husband, received a fifty-year sentence. Now the dilemma!

What is the status of Mrs. Gibson, the wife of Grady? Is Mrs. Gibson bound to her husband for life? Since Grady did not pull Eddie's wife's "panties" off, does Mrs. Gibson have the right to divorce Grady and marry someone else? What did Grady do? He just cut a woman's head off. Now, according to some, if he had just had sex with her, then, Mrs. Gibson would have a biblical reason for divorce. But since he just cut her head off—"bound for life" is the battle cry of many preachers and elders.[4]

CASE NUMBER TWO. In 1988, the *Montgomery Advertiser* (20th of April) published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." She wrote that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." This is not all! There is much more to this horror. She further describes her mistreatment: "He threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian roulette. His gun, my head."

Now the dilemma! Does God expect a woman to live with a man like that? Is this woman forbidden by God to divorce this brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, violent, sick person, simply because "sexual immorality" was not involved? If she does divorce, can she remarry without sinning? Many would say bound for life! Why? Well, you know that adultery was not committed!

Is there a biblical solution to the apparent problem? Is there the possibility of exaggeration in Jesus' statements concerning divorce? In considering the dilemmas of these two women, one should examine the use of *overstatement* as used by our Lord in His teaching techniques. Not only did Jesus avail Himself of this method, but also the Holy Spirit employs this procedure throughout the Scriptures. By not giving attention to this teaching style, one may misapply and pervert the Bible.

Overstatement and Hyperbole

Exaggeration consists of *hyperbole* as well as *overstatement*. What is the distinction between *hyperbole* and *overstatement*? Robert Stein says that *hyperbole* contains a bold exaggeration that cannot literally occur, but, on the other hand, *overstatement* is a bold exaggeration that can occur.[5] Is exaggeration or *overstatement* involved in the divorce sayings? A study of *overstatement* or *hyperbole* can assist one in a correct interpretation of many confusing Scriptures—especially Scriptures in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:21-48**). One of the divorce sayings (**5:31-32**) that Matthew records is found in this well-known Sermon. Some of the most startling uses of exaggeration are found in Jesus' Sermon. Through this practice of

exaggeration, He captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home His point.

Before analyzing the various pericopes concerning divorce, one needs to read for himself or herself the divorce sayings in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Matthew 5:31-32	Matthew 19:1-9
"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' 32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.	When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." 7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Mark 10:1-12	Luke 16:18
Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"	"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied. 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." 5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. 6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."	

Having just read these Scriptures from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how does one know that Jesus employed *exaggeration* or *overstatement* in His handling of the question of divorce? First, consider the two different narratives as reported by Mark and Luke.

Mark 10:11	**Luke 16:18**
He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."	"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

Is there anything in these verses that jumps out at you? What is it that Jesus leaves out that He included in the Matthean accounts? Did Jesus include the "exemption" clause in Mark and Luke? No! It is not there. Neither writer chronicles the "exemption" clause. On the other hand, Matthew attaches the "exemption" clause. Why? Does this inclusion in Matthew suggest that he understood the words reported by Mark and Luke to be ***overstatement***? On the one hand, it appears that the words in Mark and Luke are absolute, no exemptions. But, on the other hand, Matthew, with divine authority, interprets Jesus' words as forbidding divorce, but NOT in an absolute sense as reported by Mark and Luke.[6] For example, Matthew records, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." Why are there differences in the various accounts?

Are there any other exceptions other than what Matthew mentioned? What about Paul's letter to Corinth in which he dealt with the subject of desertion on the part of the unbeliever **(1 Corinthians 7:15)**. How did Paul deal with the issue of defection? Did Paul not know about Jesus' teachings as recorded by Matthew, Mark,

and Luke? Did Paul understand Jesus' teaching about divorce as overstatement in order to stress the original intent of marriage? Just a cursory reading of Paul's first letter to Corinth reveals that he did not interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptics as an absolute statement with no ramifications. When the unbeliever abandons the believer, Paul writes: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (**1 Corinthians 7:15**). '"Not bound' . . . almost certainly means free to marry," writes Stein.[7]

Does Paul contradict Jesus' teachings as reported by the synoptic writers? Did not Paul also write under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Matthew inserts "fornication"; Paul injects "desertion"; but Mark and Luke do not mention any valid reasons for divorce. Do Mark and Luke contradict Matthew and Paul? How does one harmonize the differences in the various accounts of the divorce sayings? Perhaps the answer lies in the literary technique of exaggeration. One can safely conclude that Jesus employed *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the Sermon on the Mount in order to highlight certain truths. Stein captures the usefulness of this literary technique in dealing with the subject of divorce. His comments about *exaggeration* in the divorce sayings are extremely helpful in unraveling the mystery that surrounds some of the most difficult teachings in Christendom. He writes,

> Exaggeration used for effect . . . . A second example is the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. We find the teaching in its absolute form in three instances and with the exception clause in two . . . . Although some would argue the reverse, most scholars believe that the unqualified form of the saying in Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians is closer to Jesus' actual words than are the Matthean versions with the exception clause. In the three non-Matthean versions we have a more authentic teaching of Jesus on divorce. . . . We have already established that Jesus made frequent use of exaggeration. Is it possible that his sayings on divorce is an exaggeration, and that Matthew introduces the exception clause to bring out its true meaning?[8]

A statement that conflicts with what is said elsewhere may contain exaggeration. For instance, in the Synoptics and Pauline writings, there are differences that exist in the divorce sayings. How does one account for the *apparent* contradictions? If one is to understand *apparent* contradictions, as opposed to *real* contradictions, one has to look at the totality of God's Word. Every interpreter must seek to understand exaggeration in light of its context. An example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' statement concerning one's relatives: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (**Luke 14:26**). Did Jesus mean this literally? How does one harmonize **Luke 14:26** with **Mark 7:9-13**? When the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law entered into direct conflict with Jesus, He questioned them about their disregard for the commandment about honoring father and mother. Listen to Mark as he narrates the events:

> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you

have handed down. And you do many things like that" (**Mark 7: 9-13**).

In **Mark 7:9**, Matthew informs the readers that Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and teachers of the law for not honoring their fathers and mothers. There is an *apparent* contradiction, not a *real* contradiction between **Luke 14:26** and **Mark 7:9**. On the one hand, one is told to hate father and mother, but, on the other hand, one is told to honor them. What is the answer to this dilemma? Hating parents is obviously an *overstatement*. What did Jesus seek to emphasize with such a bold statement in **Luke 14:26**? Was it not to put God first in one's life?

Another *apparent*, though not *real*, contradiction appears in **Luke 6:27-36**. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus addresses the attitude that His disciples should exemplify in their lives:

> But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (**Luke 6:27-36**).

How does one reconcile **Luke 6:27-36** with **Luke 14:26** (see above citation)? One simply accepts the statements in **Luke 14:26** and **Luke 6:27-36** as true, and one must. On the surface, there is an *apparent* contradiction, even though not a *real* contradiction. Unless one accepts one of these statements as *overstatement*, then, there is contradiction. By Jesus employing *overstatement* in **Luke 14:26**, He effectively brings home His intent—God is preeminent.

Another example of *overstatement* is found in **Matthew 5:42**. Jesus says: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Did Jesus intend for this Scripture to authorize an individual's demand for money without any discrimination on the part of the giver? How many are willing to follow this as an absolute statement that is binding on the person being asked? Are there no reservations in lending a helping hand? Have you ever turned away someone? If so, have you violated Jesus' command in **Matthew 5:42**? If you interpret this literally and not as *overstatement*, would you please send me your telephone number immediately—and I mean now! Do I sense hesitation? Isn't it strange how quickly one can see *overstatement* in this command of Jesus when it concerns money?

What is Jesus seeking to emphasize with such a bold statement? Is He not going straight to the "jugular vein" of covetousness? Does Jesus want greed to die? It appears that Jesus desires individuals to share with those who are less fortunate than themselves. James, our Lord's brother, also captures the essence of Jesus' words when he writes:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (**James 2:14-16**).

Again, it is necessary to compare Jesus' statement in **Matthew 5:42** with Paul's statement to the Thessalonians. He forcefully writes:

> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (**2 Thessalonians 3:10-13**).

Is there a contradiction between the words of Jesus and the words of Paul? On the surface there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home God's distaste for covetousness. Jesus could have mentioned "exemptions" to His statement in **Matthew 5:42**, but this elaboration would have taken away from the focal point—namely, man's piggishness.

Another example of exaggeration is Jesus' admonition about prayer: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (**Matthew 6:6**). Does Jesus forbid public prayers? Does not Jesus use *overstatement* to illustrate that praying is not to be done to be seen of men? Whatever work of righteousness one does must be performed to God's glory, not for self or for man. One must never carry out good works to acquire praise from men. Jesus warns His disciples against pretentious works: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (**Matthew 6:1**). Yet, on the other hand, in this same sermon, Jesus encourages the disciples to do good works: "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (**Matthew 5:15-16**). Here again there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus uses *overstatement* to emphasize that performance of religious acts must come from the heart. In other words, Jesus is saying that personal prayer is not for display and neither are works for exhibition; your acts of righteousness are a matter between you and God.

Scripture abounds in the use of *overstatement* and *exaggeration* to underscore God's real intention. For instance, consider Jesus' use of *overstatement* to highlight the importance of eliminating sin from one's life:

> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (**Matthew 5:29-30**).

Does Jesus teach that one must mutilate his or her body? This statement about mutilation of body parts is a classic example of *overstatement* in the teachings of Jesus.

Overstatement and *hyperbole* abound in Jesus' teachings in the Synoptics. Is there a distinction between these two forms of exaggeration? Yes! An *overstatement* is an exaggeration that is literally possible but *hyperbole* is literally impossible. To illustrate this separation, consider the following words of Jesus: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (**Matthew 19:24**). Jesus employs *hyperbole* to press home a point. Although a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*), nevertheless, a rich man can be saved. The point of this *hyperbole* is to emphasize with the absurd the difficulty of a rich person being saved. On the other hand, Jesus uses *overstatement* to draw attention to a central point without drawing attention to exemptions, which would weaken His emphasis. One could literally gouge out one's eye (*overstatement*), and one could literally cut off one's hand (*overstatement*), but, on the other hand, a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*). *Hyperbole* and *overstatement* were employed as teaching techniques by Jesus to capture the attention of His listeners.

Overstatements in the Divorce Sayings

Overstatement is apparently the answer to the much debated divorce sayings in the Synoptics. Jesus frequently employs various methods to inculcate His truths. The divorce sayings as reported by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul may very well have included these procedures to stress the importance of the institution of marriage. By comparing all of the divorce sayings, one can safely conclude that Jesus uses exaggeration for calling attention to the original design of marriage. If one applies the same principles to the divorce sayings that Christians have applied to other sayings of Jesus, one can then arrive at a working postulate upon which to form a judgment about the propriety or impropriety of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than sexual immorality.

In one's study of the divorce sayings, one can rule out *hyperbole*. Divorce is something one can do, that is to say, it is possible, not impossible; one can divorce with or without God's blessings. It appears that the words of Jesus are simply *overstatement*. A perusal of the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline writings reveals that the divorce accounts do not agree. Observe the following accounts:

> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery (**Mark 10:11-12**).
> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (**Luke 16:18**).
> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery (**Matthew 5:32**).
> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery (**Matthew 19:9**).
>
> But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace (**1 Corinthians 7:15**).

Neither Mark nor Luke takes notice of the "marital unfaithfulness" phrase as grounds

for divorce. On the other hand, Matthew introduces the exemption clause ("marital unfaithfulness") twice. Then, in addition to the "marital unfaithfulness" clause, Paul adds "desertion" as an additional reason.[9]

What does all of this mean? How can one harmonize *apparent* contradictions, not *real* contradictions—with the above citations? When one compares Scripture with Scripture, one can often learn whether a particular saying is an exaggeration or a specific command. The question might be asked, why would Jesus introduce exaggeration in the divorce sayings? It appears that Jesus implements exaggeration to accentuate certain truths. Why is it that neither Mark nor Luke journaled the exemption clause? One wonders if the teachings of Jesus, as journaled by Mark and Luke, fall under *overstatement*. Since neither Mark nor Luke registers the exemption clause, is it possible that Jesus employs *overstatement*? Recognition of this teaching technique of exaggeration enables one to more accurately interpret the intent of the author. An awareness of exaggeration in the Scriptures will assist one in seeking biblical answers to the baffling question of divorce and remarriage that has plagued the church for centuries. It is obvious, as stated above, there are no "pat" answers to this dilemma.

MERCY VERSUS LAW

The second aspect of this paper deals with *mercy* taking precedence over *law*. Even if exaggeration (granted for the sake of argument) is not involved in the divorce sayings as advanced in part one, nevertheless, there is still the principle of *mercy* over *law* coming into play. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* over *law*, a number of illustrations are presented to call attention to this vital concept of *mercy* taking precedence over *law* in dealing with the many problems individuals face in the marital relationship. Adultery or fornication is not always the issue in the dissolution of the marriage bond. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* taking precedence over *law*, the story of David and the Bread of the Presence is analyzed.

David and the Bread of the Presence

How does David and the Bread of the Presence help one in understanding the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Paul? Hopefully, an analysis of this episode will shed light from which Christians may draw principles upon which to base biblical decisions. Again, even if exaggeration is not found in the divorce sayings, one may consider *mercy* as another alternative to one's dilemma in dealing with divorce. *Mercy* over *law* is another aspect one needs to analyze in seeking an answer to the perplexing problems surrounding divorce and remarriage. To paint a picture about the righteousness of *mercy* taking preference over the righteousness of *law*, one only needs to read about David and the twelve loaves of bread in the Holy Place.

Matthew records Jesus' reference to an incident that occurred in the days of Abiathar the high priest. Behind this scene lies the original statement respecting the eating of the sacred bread. Moses gave instructions concerning the "bread of the Presence"—it belonged only to Aaron and his sons, that is, only to the priests:

> Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by

fire (**Leviticus 24:5-9**).

This consecrated bread was preserved only for the priests, no one else. Moses did not enter any "exemptions" to this rule. But one does read of an incident in the life of David where he and his men did eat of the consecrated bread because of hunger. This story is found in **First Samuel**:

> David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away (**1 Samuel 21:1-6**).

Jesus uses this circumstance to explain by example the principle of *mercy* over *law*. Matthew cites the first face-to-face confrontation of the religious leaders with Jesus **in Matthew 12**. The Pharisees rebuked His disciples for picking some heads of grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry. Mark, as well as Luke, also tells about this showdown. Every believer must consider carefully the parallel accounts of Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders in dealing with the subject of divorce and remarriage. One learns a great deal about *mercy* taking the lead over *law*. It appears that many Christians are as blind as were the Pharisees in this skirmish with Jesus over the *traditions of the elders*.

Matthew 12:1-8	**Mark 2:23-28**	**Luke 6:1-5**
At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.	One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man	One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his

Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."	is Lord even of the Sabbath."	companions." Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus said that David and his men did that which "was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests" (**Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:4**). In other words, in today's parlance, it was "unscriptural," as we say in the Churches of Christ. But, in spite of this unlawfulness, Jesus illustrates that it is always lawful to be humane and to save life. In other words, such compassionate acts are within the true "spirit of the law." Under normal circumstances, God would have condemned David for his disobedience to Moses' command, but because of the critical situation of need for food, compassion took supremacy over statute law.

Matthew also adds another detail, which neither Mark nor Luke records, concerning Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (**Matthew 12:7-8**). In other words, Jesus is stressing mercy over the Sabbath. It is also significant that neither Matthew nor Luke adds: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (**Mark 2:27**). With this statement, Jesus highlights the priority of man over law. Jesus' forcefully sets forth the concept that man was not made for law, but rather, law was created for man's benefit. Ordinarily, one would keep the Sabbath, but, on the other hand, there could be mitigating conditions in which mercy would take rank over the Sabbath. The implication is that one must understand that man was not brought into being to keep the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was conceived for his welfare. If in the keeping of the Sabbath, it would be detrimental to man, then, grace takes the lead over the Sabbath.

Principles Applied to Marriage Bond

Is this a principle that one could apply to the marriage bond when one finds himself or herself in an impossible situation? Was man or woman made for marriage? Or was marriage made for their benefit? It appears that the "tradition of the elders" is still alive and well on planet earth. Many still do not understand that man was not made for law, but law was made for man's benefit (**Mark 2:27**). Many Christians, especially elders and preachers, still exercise the same kind of self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited when they condemn the innocent party in a divorce when the offended person refuses to continue to live in an environment that is dangerous, risky, and hazardous to his or her well-being.[10] Christians must never forget that the Son of Man is Lord of the initial institution of marriage as well as Lord of the Sabbath. It is true that God intends one man and one woman for life; nevertheless, God, because of sin, that is to say, hardness of man's heart (**Matthew 19:8**), did give a safety valve (divorce) for an impossible situation (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**).

Jesus brought to the attention of the religious leaders the original intent of marriage. In the Garden of Eden, there was no need of a law concerning the marriage covenant. But after sin entered, God dealt with divorce because of man's sinfulness (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**). It is in this same vein that God dealt with murder. After man's expulsion from his Edenic home, God issued instructions about those who took another person's life (**Genesis 9:6**). Prior to this expulsion, there was no need to address this issue—sin had not yet entered the world. Thus, in Deuteronomy, Moses records what the Lord revealed to him concerning the unthinkable conditions in marriage. Even when Moses says, "and he writes her a certificate of divorce" (**Deuteronomy 24:1**), it was still God's design that there be one man and one woman for life (**Matthew 19:4-6**).

Again, man was not made for marriage, but marriage was initiated for his and her happiness. The original purpose in marriage is still one man and one woman for life; but since sin entered the world, there may be mitigating situations in which *mercy* takes supremacy over God's initial meaning of the institution of marriage. In other words, God in his *mercy* makes provisions for the dissolution of marriages when the hardness of the heart prevails (**Matthew 19:8**; **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**).[11]

Thus far, *exaggeration* and *mercy* have been considered in seeking answers to the complexities encountered in the ending of the marriage bond. Can one exclude *exaggeration* and *mercy* as possible answers for one's dilemma in a dangerous relationship? Is there another alternative for the dissolution of marriage when one is confronted with an absolute statement about divorce that does not set forth exemptions? What does one do with an absolute statement when no exemptions are made? Since the statements about marriage and divorce in both Mark and Luke are absolute, can one find relief from a hopeless situation in marriage? Before proceeding with an analysis of the absoluteness of the divorce sayings, it is in order to consider another graphic case of physical abuse.

CASE NUMBER THREE. On December 12, 1988, Hedda Nussbaum appeared on the coversheet of ***Newsweek***[12]**.** This is the story of two who lived together, but were not, as I understand it, married. Nevertheless, this case still serves as a vivid illustration of the predicament that women face in the real world of men.[13] But this scenario is still the same as countless women who are married can testify. If the two had been married, would she have had a valid reason to divorce her husband? Before you make a decision, please read the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey would say. Ann Jones writes about Nussbaum's picture that appeared on the cover of Newsweek on December 12, 1988 following her arrest:

> There had been other "battered women" on the covers of other magazines—Ms. For one—pretty, posed models, delicately bruised with makeup in subtle tones of mauve and heliotrope, their eyes cast down in simulation of shame or sadness. But nothing like this. Hedda Nussbaum was the real thing. The photo was shot as she testified against her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg, who was charged with murder for beating to death the six-year-old girl the couple had illegally "adopted." (Hired as an attorney to place the child, Steinberg simply took her home.) Hedda Nussbaum's bruises had healed and the discolorations faded, but her face remained permanently scarred and misshapen, remodeled first by Joel Steinberg and subsequently by Dr. Monte Keen, plastic surgeon—the man-made face of America's most famous battered woman.[14]

I remember my first impression about this story. I thought she and her husband ought

to be put to death. But, I made judgments without knowing the full story. "That face made some people weep. It made others want to destroy her. Especially women. Put her on trial, they said. Lock her up. Get rid of her. Just look at what she let him do to her. Look at what she let him do to her child," writes Jones.[15] But after the jury heard only the part that the judge would allow—not the whole story of abuse—they emerged from the jury room on January 30th with a verdict—Not Guilty of murder—but Guilty of manslaughter in the first degree.

Jones reports that at the time Hedda Nussbaum met Joel Steinberg, "She was thirty-two, good-looking, a rising editor of children's books at Random House, and he was thirty-three, good-looking, a lawyer, and (like Nussbaum) Jewish."[16] This is a description of Nussbaum when she met Steinberg in 1975.[17] But, when she was arrested on November 2, 1987, a doctor from the New York University Medical Center, who examined her from head to toe on November 3, 1987, described the forty-five year old woman to the jury as

> anemic, debilitated, malnourished, wasted, limping, and hunch-backed from osteoporosis. He found "old and new lacerations on her scalp, chunks of hair torn out from the right side of her head, an old ulceration and a new fracture on her nose, a black eye, lacerated upper lip, three- or four-month old fractures on both cheekbones, a scar on the abdomen, bruises on the abdomen and back, eight fractured right ribs, seven fractured left ribs, a very large new bruise on the right hip with many scarred areas around it, old abrasion on the left leg, and two deep, three-inch-wide ulcers on the right leg, which was infected, partly gangrenous, and red and swollen from foot to knee." The ulcerated lesions on Nussbaum's lower right leg were 'potentially fatal' injuries, the doctor said, which if untreated "could have led to blood poisoning and cardiovascular collapse."[18]

Jimmy Breslin wrote in ***Newsday***, "She looked as if she had just fought Fritzie Zivic in Pittsburgh. Fritzie used to get his thumb into an eye and turn it like he was dialing a phone number.[19] Again, Jones says that Paul Hamill of the *New York Post* ***was*** "most shocked by the nose." He also wrote, "This is the nose of an old pug, some club-fighting veteran of the St. Nicholas Arena or Eastern Parkway, battered and hurt and healed and hurt again, until it is no longer the nose worn when young."[20] The prosecutor Peter Casolaro wanted Nussbaum to tell the jury about some of Steinberg's assault, but Judge Harold Rothwax decided that the jury could not hear about his history of abuse for fear that that knowledge would inflame the jury. Prior to Nussbaum's testimony, Casolaro outlined thirty-two incidents of assaults. The newspapers printed summaries. The following is a list of atrocities taken from *Newday's* "Catalog of Abuse," cited in Jones:

1. March 17, 1978. The first time Steinberg struck Nussbaum, hitting her in the eye with an open hand. She required hospital treatment. **Admitted into evidence**.

2. In 1978. Steinberg gave Nussbaum at least ten black eyes.

3. Feb. 4, 1981. Steinberg ruptured Nussbaum's spleen in a beating. She had to go to St. Vincent's Hospital to have it removed. **Admitted into evidence.**

4. In 1982. Steinberg beat Nussbaum and she sought treatment at St. Vincent's for broken ribs.

5. In 1983. Steinberg used a broomstick to beat her on the feet, causing injury and

scars.

6. Late 1983 through 1984. Steinberg beat her severely and repeatedly during this period. Her face was disfigured, her nose broken, and her ear cauliflowered. Steinberg restricted her movements, presumably so her injuries would not be noticed. Once, when she phoned her father for help, Steinberg threw her down. This point admitted into evidence. Feb. 11, 1984. Her knee was broken in a beating and she limped to Bellevue Hospital for treatment. April 14, 1984. She was beaten and ran away.

7. In 1984. Steinberg kicked Nussbaum in the eye, producing serious injury.

8. In 1984. Steinberg hit Nussbaum in the eye, leaving her with a swollen eye.

9. In 1984. Steinberg beat Nussbaum after she refused to take a cold bath and then threw her into the bath with her clothes on. She ran away.

10. In 1984. Steinberg choked Nussbaum, damaging her vocal cords.

11. August 1984. Steinberg gave Nussbaum a black eye. She lost her job with Random House while staying home to recuperate. **Admitted into evidence**.

12. Late 1984 to early 1985. Steinberg used a blowtorch used for freebasing to burn Nussbaum, leaving scars.

13. Late 1984. Steinberg took a bath with Nussbaum and then beat her "brutally."

14. Late 1984. Steinberg used a broomstick handle to beat her hands, leaving them permanently injured.

15. In 1985. Steinberg used a stick to beat Nussbaum's sexual organs, causing them to swell for several months. In a subsequent beating, she hemorrhaged.

16. In 1985. Steinberg urinated on Nussbaum twice after throwing her to the floor.

17. Same as number 16.

18. September 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum in the bathroom and forced her to sleep there.

19. In 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum to a chinning bar in the bedroom and told her to sleep there.

20. In 1985. Steinberg struck Nussbaum, chipping or knocking out teeth.

21. Late 1985 to early 1986. Steinberg knocked her down and she cut her wrist by falling against a filing cabinet, causing injury and scarring.

22. In 1986. Steinberg hit Nussbaum, knocking out more teeth.

23. In 1986. Steinberg beat up Nussbaum in a car on the way to visit his mother.

24. In 1986. Steinberg hit her head against a wall, causing her to bleed.

25. Late 1986 through 1987. Steinberg beat Nussbaum repeatedly with a metal

exercise bar, especially during the two months before Lisa Steinberg's death on Nov. 5, 1987. **Admitted into evidence.**

26. In 1987. Steinberg struck Nussbaum with his open hand, splitting her lip repeatedly.

27. In 1987. Steinberg broke her nose again in a beating.

28. October 1987. Steinberg grabbed her by one ankle and one wrist and bounced her on the floor, severely bruising her buttocks.

29. Late 1987. When Nussbaum refused to take a cold bath, Steinberg threw her into the bathtub with her clothes on.

30. In 1987. Steinberg pulled her hair out numerous times.

31. October 1987. Steinberg repeatedly poked his fingers in Nussbaum's eyes, lacerating her nose once.

32. During the last nine years the couple lived together the physical abuse continued with regularity, "a persistent tool used . . . to control Miss Nussbaum, or . . . to break her will.[21]

Only four of the thirty-two barbarities committed against her were admitted into evidence during the trial. He received a sentence of 8 1/3 to 25 years for killing the child Lisa—no punishment for what he did to Miss Hedda Nussbaum.[22]

One additional report of this case is given to make individuals aware of the problems that many individuals face in the "ends and outs" of everyday life. Ronald Sullivan wrote in The Metropolitan News the following account of the atrocities committed against Miss Nussbaum:

> - At the direction of a female detective, Ms. Nussbaum, dressed in a dark turtleneck sweater and blue jeans, displayed her injuries to the camera, pulling up her sweater and pulling down her pants in the process. As one juror winced at the sight and others shook their heads in disbelief, the tape showed massive cuts and bruises and evidence of other injuries all over Ms. Nussbaum's body. For example, a dark bruise the size of a saucer was on her right buttock. Her right wrist was deformed, where a broken bone had healed incorrectly. Deep green ulcerations covered the length of her right leg. The condition of that leg caused one juror to gasp in shock.
> - Earlier two prosecution witnesses told the jury that Ms. Nussbaum appeared to have just suffered a savage beating when detectives and a child-abuse worker tried to question her and Mr. Steinberg about Lisa's injuries. "Her nose was caved in; her face was swollen; she was a mass of black-and-blue marks," said Joseph Petrizzo, a child-abuse caseworker in the New York City Bureau of Special Services for Children.
> - "She had a broken nose, blackened eyes, a split lip, and big clumps of her hair were missing," said Robert Columbia, a police detective assigned to sex crimes and child-abuse cases." "She was limping and she looked dazed and confused."
> - Charges of murder against Ms. Nussbaum have been dismissed on the ground that she was so beaten she was incapable of saving Lisa from death (their daughter). Ms. Nussbaum is expected to be the main prosecution

witness.[23]

What reaction should Christians exercise toward those who find themselves in an impossible situation of such cruelty? Do you say, "Adultery not involved, still bound for life"? The response of many preachers and elders today is the height of "legalism." It is on par with the religious leaders of Jesus' day, perhaps even worse. The "letter of the law" is the battle cry of many, no mercy—just law. Let God's people turn once more to Holy Scripture for a biblical solution. A biblical example should help one in seeking a biblical solution to such a baffling problem for many Christians, especially editor-bishops, preachers, and elders.

The case of David and the "Bread of the Presence," as discussed above, is worthy of recall in analyzing the above scenario of physical abuse. This example still provides an excellent illustration of "absolute statement" when dealing with extenuating circumstances that allows for *mercy* to take superiority over *law*. One finds an absolute statement concerning the eating of consecrated bread with no mention of exemptions. The law is absolute, no mention of exemptions. But when Jesus called forth this case in his dealing with the religious leaders, one quickly observes that Jesus indicates that David was without guilt: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (**Matthew 12:7**). Jesus informed the religious leaders that because of extenuating circumstances surrounding David's predicament that God overrode *law* with *mercy* (A principle that many of our religious leaders have not yet learned.).

Although there are absolute statements[24] concerning the dissolution of marriage, does this fact indicate, in and of itself, that there cannot be exemption from the marriage bond for any reason other than sexual immorality? Does an absolute statement about divorce and remarriage exclude one from divorcing for husband abuse, wife abuse, child abuse, murder, robbery, fornication, or adultery? Does the innocent party have any recourse for the wickedness of a husband or wife?

Many wives/husbands have been poisoned, brutally beaten, stabbed—even to the point of paralysis or death—and others shot or killed. Is it God's design in marriage to have a woman or a man to live with a monster or maniac simply because he or she did not engage in sexual relations outside the marriage bond? Many would say yes, but, in spite of the consensus of many, one should still analyze any absolute statement in its *intended application*. If God did not legislate specifically concerning the above issues, then one should rely upon principles set forth in the Scriptures to make a valid judgment concerning divorce for other reasons *than sexual immorality*.

LEGALISTIC APPROACH TO THIS DILEMMA

It is not uncommon for Christians to treat the Scriptures with the same legality that the religious leaders did in the days of Jesus. Just as the Pharisees used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions, so also do many preachers, editor bishops, and elders employ the Scriptures in the same illegitimate fashion to uphold their heritage.[25] One should again reflect upon the confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees in **Matthew 12:1-12**, in which Jesus reminds the Pharisees that David and his companions violated God's law, but were not condemned. Why were they not doomed? Well, Jesus informs the religious leaders that there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over law. In this encounter, Jesus also calls attention to the principle of mercy over law by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus penetrates their façade of hypocrisy by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (**Mark 2:27**). In other words, Jesus says that under the

normal state of affairs, one would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be controlling factors in which mercy takes supremacy over law.

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (**1 Samuel 21:1-6**) and the *apparent* infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions godly men did something forbidden—one by God, the other by man (traditions of the elders). Since, however, it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life (even on the Sabbath), both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the law (see **Isaiah 58:6-7**; **Luke 6:6-11**; **13:10-17**; **14:1-6**).[26] The same reasoning may be applied to other commands from God—including marriage and divorce. Neither man nor woman was made for the "marriage law," but the "marriage law" was made for their welfare. Again, there may be mitigating circumstances in which mercy takes level standing over law. Larry Richard's statement about the principles of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of the law. David and the priests broke the law but were adjudged innocent.
>
> Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage suggest that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities. . . . It is here (Matthew 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will.[27]

SCENARIO OF JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

What is one to do with *apparent* contradictory statements existing in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul? To understand the teachings of Jesus on this subject, one must consider the scenario of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. First, Matthew informs his readers that the religious leaders came to Jesus when He entered the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Second, the Pharisees asked questions about divorce, not because they wanted to know what God had said, but rather to test Him: "Some Pharisees," writes Matthew, "came to him to test him" (**Matthew 19:3**). Jesus, upon being asked His view—"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife'" (**Mark 10:2**)—realized that the whole debate was focusing upon speculations about when the divine plan for marriage can be ignored. Jesus, out of regard for the basic plan and purpose of God in marriage, replied abruptly, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law" (**Mark 10:5**). In so responding to the Jewish leaders, He is not concerned with hypothetical situations or exemptions. Rather, He is solicitous for the ideal design of God—one man and one woman for life **(Mark 10:6-8**).

In answer to the Pharisees' question about divorce, Jesus could have said, "It is written" (**Matthew 4:4**), and then cited the words of Moses in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. But in this confrontation, He did not exegete God's words on divorce to Moses, but rather, He took them back to the original institution of marriage before the fall (**Genesis 1—3**). A parallel to this marital legislation is the law concerning murder. After the "fall" in the Garden of Eden, God dealt with murder; God issued a death warrant for all

those guilty of murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (**Genesis 9:6**). There was no reason for God to legislate concerning divorce and murder prior to the fall. But because of sin, God had to enact legislation to protect the innocent (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**).

Jesus did not seek to lay down a legal pronouncement to cover every hypothetical crisis in the lives of men and women. To teach that He did is to read more into the text than Jesus himself taught. How does one know this? First, it is significant that Mark and Luke leave out the "exemption clause" (**Mark 10:10**; **Luke 16:18**). On the other hand, Matthew includes this controversial clause in the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' battle with the Jewish leaders (**Matthew 5:32; 19:9**). Then, Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, sets forth "desertion" by the unbeliever as another "exemption clause" (**1 Corinthians 7:15**). Did he contradict the teachings of Jesus in **Matthew 5:32** and **19:9**? Did he contradict **Mark 10:10** and **Luke 16:18**? Did he understand that Jesus was not giving a dissertation on marriage and divorce? Did he understand *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the teachings of Jesus? Listen to Paul's advice about desertion: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (**1 Corinthians 7:15**). Would this principle also apply in wife battering? If not, why not?

CONTEXT AND ITS INTENDED MEANING

Peace in the Messianic Age

In summary, the "divorce sayings" must be interpreted in light of their context and their intended meanings. It is not sufficient simply to quote a passage of Scripture and say this is what the Bible says. Very often the Bible does not mean what it says literally, that is, it may say one thing, but mean something else. To illustrate this principle, it is necessary to look at familiar passages in the book of Isaiah (**11:6-9; 35:8-11**) to highlight this proposition. One quickly observes that these two citations from Isaiah conflict with each other if interpreted literally.

Isaiah 11:6-9	**Isaiah 35:8-10**
The **wolf** will live with the lamb, the **leopard** will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the **bear**, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.	And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No **lion** will be there, nor will any **ferocious beast** get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10 and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

A common interpretation of **Isaiah 11:6-9** is that in the millenium kingdom, carnivorous animals will be transformed into herbivorous animals. But it is better to see this pericope (section) of Scripture as an exaggerated picture of the happiness and

serenity of the coming messianic age. Isaiah describes, in very picturesque language, the animals of the wild as living together with the more gentle animals. In one passage, the "lion" is there, yet, on the other hand, the passage in **Isaiah 35:8-10** excludes nonpeaceful animals in the picture of bliss and peace. Both passages, though literally contradictory, call forth different analogies to express the same reality, that is to say, peace in the coming messianic age.

Swallowing Camels

In **Matthew 23:24**, Jesus says, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Observe that Jesus says that the religious leaders swallowed a camel. The question is, did they? One must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey to His listeners. In most instances, the *words* and their *meanings* are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. But in "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the *words* and their *meanings* are not the same. For one to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these expressions to communicate. Through the use of *hyperbole*, Jesus effectively heightened the effective nature of His thoughts. The purpose of exaggerated language is to create a greater impression and to stir His hearers to reflect more closely upon the reality of their hypocritical actions and to consider more firmly His teachings.

Sawdust in the Eyes

Through exaggeration, Jesus is able to create a picture that is unforgettable. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Who can forget the figures of "sawdust" in one's eye and a "plank" in another eye. Or who can forget the words of Jesus, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (**Matthew 19:24**). Such pictures are long remembered. Jesus employed bold language to impress upon the hearer the seriousness of what He was telling them.

Peace on Earth

Another example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' announcement: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (**Matthew 10:34**). How does one harmonize this pronouncement with other statements in Matthew, Mark and Luke? For instance, consider the following:

> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (**Matthew 5:9**).
> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (**Mark 5:34**).
>
> As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes (**Luke 19:41-42**).
> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests**. (Luke 2:13-14**).

If one interprets "I did not come to bring peace" literally, then, this contradicts Mark's and Luke's "peace" sayings. Also, a literal interpretation would not harmonize with Paul's letter to Rome: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have

peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Romans 5:1**). The context is the determining factor for **Matthew 10:34**. This sword did not have anything to do with politics or military action. Jesus employed the term "sword" as a metaphorical description of the division that faith in Christ often brings about; namely, the dissolution of the family unit when one member of the family becomes a Christian.

Praying in the Closet

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the disciples to pray secretly: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" (**Matthew 6:6**). Is this command to be interpreted literally? Is this not *overstatement*? Can one pray in public, even though this command tells one to "close the door and pray"? Jesus did not always pray in His closet.

> After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray (**Mark 6:46**).
> One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God (**Luke 6:24**).
> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray (**Luke 9:28**).

Children were also brought to Jesus for prayers: "Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he departed (**Matthew 19:13-15**). Matthew does not mention the prayers, but he does allude to Jesus' touching the children. No doubt He also prayed for the children.

Swearing

Another fine example of *overstatement* is Jesus' teaching on swearing. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

> Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one (**Matthew 5:33-37**).

Is this an absolute prohibition again swearing? Can Christians swear in court? Can a Christian swear when taking his or her driver's license? The Sermon on the Mount abounds with *overstatement*. On another occasion Jesus did not forbid total refrain from swearing. In His confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus says,

> Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by

everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it (**Matthew 23:16-22**).

In this scenario, Jesus condemns the view of the religious leaders in their willingness to swear by the temple or the altar as nothing. On the other hand, if they swore by the gold of the temple or the gift that they offered on the altar, then, the oath is binding. It is also worthy of observation that Jesus did not refuse to be placed under oath. To begin with, Jesus remained silent; but the high priest said, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (**Matthew 26:63**). Then Jesus no longer remained silent: "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (**Matthew 26:64**). Jesus responds in compliance with the law: "If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible" (**Leviticus 5:1**).

Hating Parents

How does one determine if a statement or saying is *hyperbole* or *overstatement*? The study of parallel passages often shed light in helping to determine exaggeration. It is apparent that the Gospel writers were not always concerned with the *ipsissima verba*. One cannot always be sure that the Evangelist sought to convey the exact wording of Jesus' sayings. A good example is found in **Luke 14:26** and its parallel in **Matthew 10:37**.

Luke 14:26	**Matthew 10:37**
If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.	Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Through Matthew's account, one is able to observe that Jesus' bidding to hate one's family, as recorded in **Luke 14:26**, was not meant to be taken literally but was an *overstatement* used for effectiveness. In this hate relationship, Jesus employs exaggeration to highlight the superiority of faithfulness to God over faithfulness to family ties, as is evident from the fact that Jesus' statement conflicts with His other clear statements about loving one's parents or enemies.

Mark 7:9-13	**Mark 10:19**	**Luke 6:27**
And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother:	You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.'	But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.

‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.		

Yes, Jesus must be exaggerating in **Luke 14:26**. Jesus employed *overstatement* in His encouraging His disciples to submit to the teachings of the Pharisees (**Matthew 23:2-3**). This statement conflicts with His teachings in **Matthew 16:6; 16:11-12**. On the surface there appears to be a *real* contradiction. But the contradiction is not *real* but only *apparent*.

Matthew 23:2-3	**Matthew 16:6, 11-12**
The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.	“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When one seeks to find in both passages an absolute reference to every single teaching of the Pharisees, does one find an unresolvable problem? In general, the teachings of Jesus were similar to that of the religious leaders. On the other hand, Jesus objected strenuously to the oral traditions of Pharisees and Scribes. Matthew writes:

> The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?” He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the

> commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that" (**Mark 7:1-13**).

It is apparent that it is best to look upon these citations from Scripture as statements containing exaggeration to draw attention to certain aspects of the Pharisees' doctrines and practices—not a blanket endorsement or condemnation.

CONCLUSION

Since this essay is about the *divorce sayings* in the Synoptics and Pauline accounts, it seems appropriate, once more, in concluding this essay, to draw attention again to the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. One finds the teaching of divorce in its absolute form in three instances and also with the exception clause in three—two by Jesus, one by Paul. The following charts set forth the "absolute forms" as well as the "exception forms":

ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM
Mark 10:11	**Luke 16:18**	**1 Corinthians 7:10-11**
He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.	Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries divorced woman commits adultery.	To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. 11 But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

EXECPTION FORM	EXECPTION FORM	EXECPTION FORM
Matthew 5:32	**Matthew 19:9**	**1 Corinthians 7:15**
But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.	But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

As stated above, Jesus accuses the religious leaders of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (**Matthew 23:24**). Jesus says they swallowed a camel, period! The question is, did they? One must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey. In most instances, the "words" and their "meanings" are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. But in "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the "words" and their "meanings" are not

synonymous. For one to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these words to convey.

To take words in Mark (**10:10**) and Luke (**16:18**) literally would be to lose sight of their designed purpose. To take all the assertions of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount literally would be to lose sight of His contemplated aim. The language Jesus uses in His teaching is not an end—in and of itself—but an instrument by which He seeks to convey what He means. Should one say that one must not interpret the Bible literally? The answer is *yes* and *no*. Is this a catch twenty-two question? Dammed if you say *yes* and dammed if you say *no*! Stein correctly says, "The answer to this question is that we are to take the meaning of the Bible literally."[28] In other words, the *meaning* of the words and not simply the *words* themselves is to be considered in one's interpretation. One, for example, may quote what the Bible says and not necessarily give the intended meaning.[29] The literal interpretation of many Scriptures would result in nonsense.

One should stop playing God with the lives of men and women. Many believers occupy the "throne of God" in their condemnation of those who do not concur with their particular brand of orthodoxy. Some decisions have to be left up to the individual. Paul goes right to the very heart of the matter when he writes, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (**Romans 14:4**). As one can surmise, the problem of divorce and remarriage is not an easy question to deal with. Especially when someone finds himself or herself involved with a spouse who is guilty of some "unclean thing" (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**; **Matthew 5:32; 19:9**; **1 Corinthians 7:15**).

CASE NUMBER FOUR. This essay concludes with one additional scenario in which sexual immorality was not involved. After you read the story, please answer the question, is this young lady bound to her husband until he commits "fornication"? Does the principle of *mercy* take precedence over *law*? On June 24, 1981, the Montgomery Advertiser published the following article:

Woman struck by vehicle

> A 19-year-old woman was struck by a motor vehicle on the Atlanta Highway Tuesday night and badly injured, according to police. The vehicle left the scene of the accident with the woman lying in the southbound turn lane near Fox Hollow Road, said Sgt. W.H. Pertree. Police learned of the accident when "somebody stopped" a patrol car "and told them somebody had been hit," Lt. B.J. Cleveland said. Police did not release the name of the woman Tuesday night. A St. Margaret's Hospital spokesman said the woman was in critical condition. The accident occurred at about 9:20. Cpl. Leion Sims said there were five or six people who saw the woman walking before she was struck, but "nobody we've come up with actually saw her get hit by the car." Doctors told Sims the woman was responding to treatment, although she was still unconscious at 12:30 a.m. Wednesday. Police hope to question her Wednesday morning.[30]

Well, what does the above article have to do with "wife battering"? Is this not a story about a "hit and run" accident? This article does not tell the whole story; the next day another article appeared that revealed the whole sordid story of wife abuse. She was brutally beaten by her husband. A few years after this inhuman treatment by her husband, I talked with this young woman and obtained photocopies of her ordeal in the hospital. The pictures taken by the police at the time of the accident (actually, wife beating) reveal a tremendous loss of blood. In fact, after viewing the pictures, one

wonders how one could lose so much blood and still live. After you read the story, ask yourself this question, should she have gone back to her husband? If she leaves, is she still bound to him for the rest of her life since he did not commit adultery—he just tried to kill her? If she leaves, is she biblically bound to live a celibate life since he did not commit a sexual sin? The crime scene was horrendous; the blood in the pictures covered the length and breath of her body; she looked as if she had been in a tornado. Are you ready for the rest of the story? On June 25, 1981, the following article appeared:

City Woman Badly Beaten

> A 19-year-old woman, originally thought to be a victim of a hit-and-run accident, was the victim of a severe beating, police said today. Sandra Ann Cooper, 135 Turner Place, was found lying in the southbound lane of the 5100 block of the Atlanta Highway about 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to police reports. Ms. Cooper was in stable condition in St. Margaret's Hospital's intensive care until this morning, a hospital spokesman said. Sgt. H.C. Norton said the young woman was improving, but doctors said she was not coherent enough to talk to police. According to police reports, Ms. Cooper was struck several times on the head with a blunt object. She also suffered wounds to the left (should be right—RDB), reports shows. Police found the woman after a man stopped a patrol car and said "somebody had been hit," Norton said. Norton said police originally though she had been injured after being struck by a motor vehicle.[31]

As you reflect upon this inhumane treatment by the husband, what is your reaction? Is she bound in marriage to this man for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sexual relations with another woman? Is this a case in which the principle of mercy takes precedence over law? Do you react against divorce as an alternative to be released from a tyrant? Is your position the same as the Pharisees that Jesus encountered? Just how do you interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptic and Pauline accounts? Would Jesus rebuke you today for your uncompromising attitude of wooden literalness in your interpretation of the divorce sayings? Are hyperbole or exaggeration or overstatement an important element in the teachings of Jesus? God help each of us to make the right choice with love and mercy as the guiding star.

APPENDIX I

Scripture Citations

Isaiah 58:6-7	Luke 6:6-11
"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?	On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" He looked around at them all, and then said to the man,

	"Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Luke 13:10-17	**Luke 14:1-6**
On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.	One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" And they had nothing to say.

[1] All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless otherwise stated.

[2] Robert H. Stein, *Interpreting Puzzling Tests in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 95.

[3] James O'Reilly, "Wife Beating: The Silent Crime" ***Time*** 5 September 1983, 23, writes: "Nearly 6 million wives will be abused by their husbands in any one year. Some 2,000 to 4,000 women are beaten to death annually. The nation's police spend one third of their time responding to domestic-violence calls. Battery is the single major cause of injury to women, more significant than auto accidents, rapes or muggings." Again, he captures the mentality of many preachers, elders, or editor bishops, when they encourage the battered-wife to stay in such a relationship:

> If the woman does not leave or seek help after the first episode, it can be taken as a sign of acquiescence, which usually leads to more violence. But it is extremely difficult to pack up and go, even if a woman can afford to. Explains Jane Tolliver, a counselor in the Atlanta Y.W.C.A'S battered-women's program: "They've been told by their ministers and their families that a good woman can change a man." These women represent society's traditional values. Says Tolliver: "They are nurturing. They want successful marriages. And it is precisely those things that trap them" (Ibid., 24, the "bold" and "underlining" is my emphasis--RDB).

[4] This is no joke. It is true! I have talked with a number of preachers, who say, "bound for life." Does this kind of reasoning remind one of the reasoning that Jesus encountered with the religious leaders in His day? The Pharisees, teachers of the law, and elders of the people had no concept of "mercy" over "law." This philosophy is still in vogue by many religious leaders today, especially preachers and elders. I thank God that this kind of attitude is not prevalent with all preachers and elders. I know of many who repudiate such illogical thinking.

[5] Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 48-49.

[6] Did Jesus give the *exemption clause* in His confrontation with the religious leaders as recorded by Mark and Luke? Both **Mark 10:1-12** and **Matthew 19:1-9** chronicle the same sketch. How does one account for the discrepancy? Which of the two recordings are original? If Jesus gave the *exemption clause*, one wonders why Mark and Luke left out this phrase. Did Jesus later discuss this absolute statement, as reported by Mark and Luke, with His disciples? Did He discuss this subject of divorce at a later time with His disciples in the same way He did with them about the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:5-12)? Did He explain His divorce saying in greater detail? Or did Matthew understand from the beginning that exaggeration or *overstatement* was involved in this divorce saying?

[7] Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 130.

[8] Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole*, 48-49.

[9] Does *marital unfaithfulness* include *desertion*? Does *marital unfaithfulness* include "wife-battering"? Is the word "fornication" more comprehensive in its total meaning than just *sexual immorality*?

[10] The attitude of the religious leaders in this episode of adherence to the traditions of the elders reminds one of the self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited on numerous occasions in their rebuke of Jesus.

[11] Does **Matthew 5:31-32** and **Matthew 19:1-9** contradict **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**?

[12] See Ann Jones, ***Next Time, She'll Be Dead: Battering & How to Stop It*** (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994), 167-198, for detailed information about her torture from her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg..

[13] In the near future, it is my intention to document case after case of wife battering: "Domestic Violence and Biblical Divorce."

[14] ***Next Time, She'll Be Dead***, 167.

[15] Ibid., 168.

[16] Ibid., 182.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 168-169.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 170-173.

[22] Ibid., 197.

[23] Ronald Sullivan, "Jurors See Graphic Tape of Nussbaum," ***Metropolitan News*** 4 November 1988, 1 (B) and 6 (B).

[24] An analysis of the divorce sayings appears to be ***overstatement*** rather than absolute statements. But for the sake of argument, should one advance the concept that the divorce sayings in Mark and Luke are not ***overstatements***, then, one must deal with the concept of absolutes. Does an absolute statement about divorce forbid the dissolution of marriage under certain circumstances?

[25] This statement is not a blanket condemnation of editors, preachers, or elders. There are many that do not fall into this category. Even though there are a few "bad apples," this awareness does not warrant censure of all editors, preachers, or elders. For example, the editor of Ensign (Pat Kilpatrick) writes against dictators within the kingdom. In Montgomery, Alabama, there are three congregations (there may be more) in which the elders nor preachers operate as absolute rulers: (1) Vaughn Park Church of Christ, (2) Family of God [Carriage Hills Church of Christ], and (3) Landmark Church of Christ. Because they do NOT enforce traditional interpretations on other Christians, these three congregations are regularly written up by one of the most legalistic congregations in Montgomery, Alabama, that is, the Seibles Road Church of Christ.

[26] See *Appendix I* for full citations of these Scripture.

[27] Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of the Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

[28] Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 11.

[29] For further details concerning this concept of just simply quoting a biblical passage without regard to context, see Dallas Burdette, "Bible Speaking" in *Ensign* 18, no. 5 (May 1990):

[30] "Woman struck by vehicle," in ***Montgomery Advertiser*** 24 June 1981. (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

[31] "City Woman Badly Beaten," in ***Montgomery Advertiser*** 25 June 1981**.** (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

Dallas Burdette April 11, 1998

Thrust Statement: The resurrection of Jesus guarantees endurance now and final conquest in the hour of death.

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Today is a time that the world is thinking about the One who rose from the dead to die no more. Yes, today is a time that the world is thinking about the One who triumphed over death. You are here because of your consciousness of this One who is called Jesus Messiah. You are here because of your desire to pay homage to Him who is also called King of kings and Lord of Lords (**1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16**). Hopefully, this message—in the face of temptation, persecutions, and death—will cause us to reflect upon the resurrection of Jesus for endurance and comfort in the hour of temptation, persecution, or death. It is also my desire that this resurrection message will cause each of us to reflect upon the question that Pilate asked the crowd: "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" (**Matthew 27:22**).

If you have not yet responded to Jesus as Lord, I plead with you to accept Jesus as your savior. I encourage you to accept God's point of view about Jesus as revealed to Joseph by an angel of the Lord: "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you

are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (**Matthew 1:20-21**). Again, one hears God's point of view following the baptism of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (**Matthew 3:17**). Once more, I now invite you to approach the Mount of Transfiguration to hear God's testimony about Jesus: "A voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'" (**Matthew 3:5**).

Following this startling scene, Jesus tells His disciples not to make known the events that they had just witnessed until after His resurrection. Matthew informs us that: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (**Matthew 17:9**). As you reflect upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, God's saving action requires a response from you. God's saving action does not take place automatically in the human sphere, but it requires a response from every human being. Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew says, "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (**Matthew 4:17**). After the resurrection of Jesus, Luke informs us that on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, that "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (**Acts 2:41**).

No one can read the New Testament without observing the passion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Messiah. The passion and resurrection of Jesus are cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. The historical fact of the resurrection is the very basis for the truth of Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christianity stand or fall together. The resurrection was the one thing that declared Jesus to be the Son of God. Paul writes, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (**Romans 1:1-4**). In the Gospels, we have the redemptive event; in the books of Acts, we have the redemptive experience; and in the Epistles, we have the redemptive explanation of the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. In the epistles of Paul, he sets forth the scheme of redemption through faith in Jesus and insists that this redemption is the basis of our salvation and, at the same time, the goal of our sanctification and service.

This exhortation to remembrance and faithfulness is clearly set forth in the passage before us (**2 Timothy 2:1-10**). Paul did not want Timothy to waver or fall short under the anxieties of preaching or of ill-treatment; thus, he strongly advises him to "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David" (2 Timothy 2:8). In other words, Paul reminds Timothy that what ever comes to pass, Jesus is alive! It is this fact of Jesus' resurrection that guarantees endurance now and final conquest in the hour of death. This understanding that Jesus is alive is declared to be the Gospel by Paul: "This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**).

What Paul is saying to Timothy is the ultimate message for you and me. For Christians to know that Jesus is alive is what really matters, for in our risen Lord we find the courage to live and the comfort to die. This fact of Jesus' persecution called forth the admonition to "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him

endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (**Hebrews 12:2-3**).

WE ARE TO REMEMBER THE FACT OF THE RESURRECTION

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel" (**2 Timothy 2:8**). Paul is stating a fact that has the support of prophetic, historic and dynamic evidence. It is still helpful for Christians in this age of doubt to reexamine and reevaluate the evidence that Paul sets before us.

There Is the Fact of the Prophetic Evidence

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, ***descended from David***" (**2 Timothy 2:8**). The phrase "descended from David" shifts our focus back to the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament. Matthew begins his Gospel: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (**Matthew 1:1**). "Son of David" appears to be a messianic title prevalent in Matthew's day. Matthew also reports that two blind men attributed this title to Jesus: "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" (**9:27**). On another occasion, following the healing of a man born both blind and mute, the crowds were so amazed that they said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (**12:23**).

The title "Son of David" was a popular title for the Messiah (**Matthew 9:2**7). It refers especially to the prophecies of Isaiah where the virgin-born Son (**Isaiah 7:14**) is the Child who is born. Again, the "Son of David" is also the Son who is given (**9:6**). This "Son of David" is also the Rod or Shoot out of the stem of David's father, Jesse. In other words, Jesus, the "Son of David" is the new Branch out of his roots (**11:1**). Also, the Davidic Covenant appears to be in mind in **2 Samuel 7:11-16**. Paul, in his sermons, often cited the Old Testament to substantiate his defense of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of David and His resurrection. When Paul was in Pisidian Antioch, he proclaimed:

> We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:
>
> > 'You are my Son;
> > today I have become your Father.'
>
> The fact that **God raised him from the dead**, never to decay, is stated in these words:
>
> > 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised
> > to David.' So it is stated elsewhere:
> > 'You will not let your Holy One see decay.'
>
> "For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. **But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.**
>
> "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness

of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

> ‘Look, you scoffers,
> wonder and perish,
> for I am going to do something in your days
> that you would never believe,
> even if someone told you’" (**Acts 13:32-41**).

There Is the Fact of the Historic Evidence

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David" (**2 Timothy 2:8**). The four Gospels are united in their testimony that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The book of Luke, like the book of Matthew and Mark, closes with Christ’s appearance before all the disciples. There were many eyewitness accounts of the resurrection (**Acts 1:1-3; Luke 1:1-4**). The accounts of the appearances of Christ were not fleeting glimpses of a stranger in a dark alley; these appearances occurred over a period of forty days. He appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (**Matthew 28:1-7**). He also appeared to the eleven (**28:16-20**). Luke also gives the account of the two men’s conversation with Jesus as they were on their way to a village called Emmaus (**Luke 24:13-27**). Thomas, one of the apostles who was not present when Jesus appeared to the eleven, later witnessed the presence of Jesus (**John 20:19-20**). Peter, on the day of Pentecost, gives the following testimony as to the veracity of the resurrection: "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact" (**Acts 2:32**). On another occasion, Peter addressed a crowd concerning the resurrection.

> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but **God raised him from the dead**. We are witnesses of **this** (**Acts 3:13-15**).

Paul also mentions that "he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (**1 Corinthians 15:6**).

WE ARE TO CONSIDER THE FORCE OF THE RESURRECTION

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel" (**2 Timothy 2:8**). These words constitute the threefold encouragement Paul gives to Timothy. **First**, he encourages him to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (**2:1**). But this admonition is also true of us. It is true of every Christian. **Second**, we have the power to stand: "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer" (**2:3-4**). It is in this same vein that Paul told the Corinthians: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (**1 Corinthians 15:58**). Yes, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (**Romans 8:37**). **Third**, we have the power

to strive for Christ: "Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules," writes Paul (**2 Timothy 2:5**). As Christians, we have a race to run, a course to finish. Thus, Paul turns our attention from the scene of the battle to the Olympic arena. And **fourth**, we have the power to serve Christ: "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops" (**2:6**). Every Christian has a job to do, and that calls for faithfulness.

WE ARE TO DELIVER THE FAITH OF THE RESURRECTION

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory " (**2 Timothy 2:8-10**). If we are convinced of the fact and force of the resurrection, then, we cannot be silent. This steadfastness in proclamation of the good news is what Paul is telling Timothy to continue to proclaim. For Paul the Lord Jesus was a living reality. For us Jesus should be a living reality. Paul was prepared to preach the gospel, no matter what the cost. This is what he wanted Timothy to do, and this is what he wants us to do. We must preach the gospel whatever the cost.

The message of Easter is that Jesus is alive! This is the fact that we must see. This is the faith that we must share. Are you sharing your faith in Jesus? Are you willing to suffer because of your faith in the resurrection of Jesus? Are you producing fruit in your life because of your belief in the resurrection of Jesus Messiah? Where do you stand today? I wonder if you know that Jesus is alive right now. I wonder if you have ever asked Him to forgive you of your sins. If not, why not ask Him to do that for you right now. Why not respond in the same way that 3000 did on the day of Pentecost when they inquired about what to do to be saved. You recall the words of Peter don't you? In response to the crowd, Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**).

Preached: Grassy Church of Christ, Arab, AL, April 12, 1998

The King's Victory

Thrust statement: **The final victory in Matthew is a victory of triumph.**

Scripture reading: **Matthew 28:1-20**

A DAY OF REFLECTION

Today is a day that the world is reflecting upon the resurrection of Jesus. Since the resurrection of Jesus is on the minds of so many, then it is appropriate that we too meditate upon Christ's victory over the forces of death and evil. If anything proves the kingship of Jesus Christ, it is His resurrection from the dead. The final victory in Matthew is a record of triumph. It is a thrilling fact that believers share in that conquest. It is in this vein that Paul writes:

> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection (**Romans 6:1-5**). [1]

God in His infinite wisdom allows every person who desires to become a child of God to share in the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus. As a result of our participation in His resurrection, we are to live a new life—a life of holiness and a life

dedicated to God's service. Yes, we are a new creation as a result of our resurrection with Him. When Paul writes his second epistle to the Corinthians, he reminds them of this fact of rebirth:

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**).

I appeal to each of you today to reflect upon the implications of the resurrection of Jesus and your resurrection with Him. The very fact that we have been resurrected with Jesus necessitates a change in life style. Are you living in sin? Are you neglectful of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit? Do you live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? Has your reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus made a difference in how you live? Just what does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you? Just what does the death of Jesus mean to you? Should the death and resurrection of Jesus affect the way you live? Again, listen to the words of Paul as he makes his appeal for purity in the lives of God's people:

> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (**2 Corinthians 5:14-15**).

This appeal to the resurrection is the same petition that Paul makes to the **Romans** (**chapter 6**). The resurrection of Jesus is central to every believer. Again, I ask, has the resurrection made a difference in the way you live? If it hasn't, then you have received God's grace in vain. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they should "no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." He concludes his admonition to holiness by calling attention to their relationship with God: "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain (**2 Corinthians 6:1**).

THE DISCIPLES THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD

Let us turn our attention again to the resurrection of Jesus and to His disciples' reaction to the resurrection. It is remarkable that His followers did not believe that He would resurrect on the third day. Matthew begins his story by calling attention to the women who came to the tomb early on the first day of the week. He writes:

> After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb (**Matthew 28:1**).

These women who had lingered at the cross came early to the tomb and wondered about

the removal of the stone. In fact, Mark gives additional information concerning the number of women and their thoughts concerning the moving of the stone:

> When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" (**Mark 16:1-3**).

They wondered how the stone would be moved. They did not expect the stone to be moved. They did not count on the resurrection. They were not looking for the "living among the dead" (**Luke 24:5**). They were looking for a dead Christ, not a living Christ. Thus, the angel asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" While they were in the tomb, two angels stood by them and reminded them that Jesus had told them about His resurrection while He was with them in Galilee: '"The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.' Then they remembered his words" (**Luke 24:6**). It is remarkable that they did not believe in His resurrection, even though He had taught this truth repeatedly. Matthew records four predictions of Jesus about His death and resurrection:

- From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (**Matthew 16:21**).

- When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (**Matthew 17:22-23**).

- Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (**Matthew 20:17-19**).

- Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (**Matthew 26:31-32**).

Following the instructions of the angel, Mary Magdalene "went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it" (**Mark 16:10-11**). Later, Mark reveals that "Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen" (**16:14**). Luke concludes his book with these words:

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (**Luke 24:44-49**).

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Many believe that Jesus died, but the world, as a whole, does not believe that He arose from the dead. But it is this message—the resurrection from the dead—that Peter on the day of Pentecost emphasized.

> Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear (**Acts 2:29-33**).

The resurrection is emphasized throughout the book of Acts. Following the day of Pentecost, Peter had an occasion to speak to some onlookers who had just witnessed Peter's healing of a crippled beggar. In his conversation with the onlookers, he accuses them of participation in the conviction and crucifixion of Jesus. In this speech, Peter attests to the fact of the resurrection.

> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this (**Acts 3:13-15**).

The next day, Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin. They wanted to know by what authority Peter accomplished such a miracle. Then, says Luke, Peter filled with the Holy Spirit said to them:

> Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this

man stands before you healed (**Acts 4:8-10**).

A few years after the conversion of Paul, Paul took Barnabas and John Mark on his first missionary journey. During this journey, Paul, in Pisidian Antioch, addresses the people by telling them about Jesus. In the proclamation of God's good news, he says, "But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people" (**Acts 13:30-31**). Among this number of witnesses that Paul alludes to were, no doubt, some of the women who visited the tomb early on the first day of the week. During Paul's second missionary journey, he appealed to the Thessalonians to accept the resurrection of Christ. Luke informs us that "As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (**Acts 17:2-3**).

Later, when Paul was in Athens, he again talked about the resurrection of Christ. In the course of his speech, he said, "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead**" (Acts 17:31**). What is the significance of the resurrection? It proves that Jesus is God's Son. It verifies the truth of Scripture. Both in the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus, His resurrection is clearly taught. Peter cites two Old Testament Scriptures (**Psalms 16:10** and **Psalms 110:1**) in his sermon on the day of Pentecost to prove the resurrection from the Old Testament.

Peter prefaces **Psalms 16:8-11** with his comments: "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (**Acts 2:24**). This psalm reads:

> [8] I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. [9] Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, [10] because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. [11] You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (**Psalms 16:8-11**).

Again, Peter relies upon another citation, as stated above, from **Psalms 110:1** to substantiate his belief that the Old Testament foretold the resurrection of Jesus. Prior to quoting this Psalm, he says, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear" (**Acts 2:32-33**). Peter then makes the argument that "David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said (**2:34**):

> The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (**Psalms 110:1**).

CONCLUSION

As we conclude the message, let everyone remember that Jesus is alive. Jesus

arose from the grave on the third day. Have you been raised with Christ through baptism? If not, why not submit yourselves to Him in baptism that you too may share in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. The Old Testament predicted His resurrection. Jesus foretold His death, burial, and resurrection. The apostles proclaimed His resurrection. Are you telling others about His victory over death through His resurrection? Have you accepted the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life?

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[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

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